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THE AFTERGLOW OF GOD

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LONDON: HODDER AND STOUGHTON

THE
AFTERGLOW OF GOD
Sunday Evenings in a
Glasgow Pulpit

BY THE REV.
G. H. MORRISON, M.A.
GLASGOW

*'Then of those Shadows, which one made descent
Beside me I knew not ; but Life ere long
Came on me in the public ways, and bent
Eyes deeper than of old : Death met I too,
And saw the dawn glow through.'*

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
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MCMXII

These brief addresses, like those of the former volumes of this series, have been prepared from week to week after the more severe preparations for the forenoon diet of worship were completed. It has been my habit at the morning service to handle the greater themes of the Christian revelation, and then at the evening worship to allow myself a wider scope, putting essential things in a somewhat different setting, and calling to my help every interest I could command. My great aim in this has been to win the attention, in honourable ways, of some at least of that vast class of people who to-day sit so lightly to the church. I trust I have not altogether failed in this endeavour; and I gratefully acknowledge a pretty steady inflow of these quiet acknowledgments which are among the most precious seals of ministry.

G. H. M.

*Wellington Church,
Glasgow, 1912.*

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THE OPENING NOTE

The song of the Lord began with the trumpets.—2 Chron. xxix. 27.

HEZEKIAH was one of the most perfect kings who ever sat upon the throne of Judah. His reign was as different from that of his father Ahaz as the day is from the night. His first great work was to reopen the temple, which he found in a shocking state of disrepair. This was accompanied, as one would expect, with much magnificence of ceremonial. And it is in connection with this revived worship that we light on the statement of our text—the song of the Lord began with the trumpets. That there were other musical instruments employed is, of course, apparent from the context. And some of them doubtless would be very sweet, and capable of uttering a vast range of feeling. But the one point which I note to-night is this, and I should like to fix it in

A

your thoughts—that the song of the Lord *began* with the trumpet note. Now, tell me, what is that trumpet note? It is the note, not of sweetness but of power. There is no doubt about it—no uncertainty—it rings out in a commanding way. It is the music of challenge and defiance, and it stirs the heart into the joy of battle—and the song of the Lord began with the trumpets. Now it seems to me as I meditate on things that the song of the Lord has a way of doing that. There is a place in it for every instrument, but the shrilling of the trumpet is its prelude. And I shall try to-night to show you what I mean, and to catch, in one or two directions, echoes of this ordering of Hezekiah.

Well, in the first place, think of the Bible. Now the Bible, whatever else it be, is in a great and glorious sense the song of the Lord. On the yearning spirit of mankind it falls as the music of the infinite. God has not given us a creed of logic, nor has he given us a formal catechism. He has given us a book that from first to last is strangely beautiful and rich in melody. And so unforgettable is this sweet melody, and so haunting in its cadences and comforts, that it lingers with us

through the years of battle, and comes to us again when we are dying. Sometimes it is full of gladness, and sometimes it is full of tears. There is a strain in it to reach the merry heart, and there is a strain to woo and win the prodigal. But when I turn to the commencement of it, and when I read, *In the beginning God*, I feel that here, as in the temple ritual, it is with the trumpet that the song begins. What a note of magnificent defiance rings out in that first chapter of the Bible! To every atheist—every polytheist—it cries out, In the beginning God. It looks abroad over the arch of heaven, where the sun shines, and where the stars are glittering, and putting the trumpet to its lips it cries, God created the heavens and the earth. The day was to come when in that heavenly music there were to be bitter and pathetic notes. There were to be voiced in it such doubts and fears as only the stricken soul can understand. But in the first note there is no doubt. It is a challenge to an embattled world. It rings with a confidence that is sublime in the almighty Creator of the universe. That is why men, spite of all change of view, never can give up that opening chapter. It stirs

THE OPENING NOTE

the spirit so, and is so thrilling, when we are wearied with our speculations. Spite of our altered outlook in these latter days, we read it and we are reanimated—and that is the noble music of the trumpet.

Indeed one of the sadnesses of Biblical criticism, to some of us, is just that it makes it so hard to catch that note. It is an ancient tradition of the Jews that in heaven there is trumpet music every morning. And one of the most pathetic legends in the world is an old Jewish legend which refers to that. It is about Lucifer, son of the morning, who for pride was cast out of heaven into the pit. And some one asked him what he missed most of all that he had lost when he lost heaven. And Lucifer answered, *I miss most the sound of the trumpets in the morning.* I have often thought of that old story when I have been deep in the study of the Bible. As an honest man, responsible to God, I dare not shut out the light of these last days. And yet sometimes, when I think of all the difference that the new light upon the Word has made for me—I miss the sound of the trumpets in the morning. Our fathers heard it, and rejoiced in it. We heard

it gloriously when we were children. There was no difficulty then, and no dubiety, and nothing incredible in any narrative. But now, with all our added knowledge, drawn from a hundred sources irrefutable, sometimes when the heart is weary, we miss the ringing of the trumpet note. There is no help for it. It must be borne. It will all come right again if we be faithful. I suppose that always, if we are loyal to truth, we must forfeit the trumpet music for a little. But there is one thing we shall never forfeit, and that is the good conscience and the happy heart, if we are true to the light wherever it may lead, and to the inward voice of the Eternal.

Again I think our text is illustrative of the earthly ministry of Christ. It is not only suggestive of the written word ; it is also suggestive of the Incarnate Word. There never was a ministry on earth so rich in its variety as Christ's. There is a range in it, of power and appeal, that has been the wonder of the ages. Spite of the narrow sphere where it was exercised, and spite of the limitations he assumed, how wonderful in its breadth and height and depth is the ministry of our Redeemer. There is the music of unutterable

love in it, to the sinner and the lonely and the prodigal. There is the lingering note of patience inexhaustible to men who seemed as though they would never learn. There is the passion of scorn in it for all hypocrisy—the most stern and terrible rebuke—the pleading of a heart that was nigh broken. What an unequalled song of the Lord that was, the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ ! What a fulness in it—what a compass—what an unfailing and glorious variety ! Yet here again, as in the written word (and not by chance here any more than there), it is with the trumpet that the song begins. Driven by the Spirit into the wilderness, what is the one note of that opening scene ? It is not love yet, nor is it patience. It is not the pleading of a tender heart. It is the ringing music of defiance : it is a challenge to the powers of darkness : it is a loud and glorious trumpet-blast against the temptations of the devil. The day was coming when Jesus Christ would say, ‘Come unto me, all ye that are heavy laden’ ; when he would say, ‘I am the good shepherd ; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.’ But now, in the opening hour of his ministry it is not *that*, but ‘Get thee behind

me, Satan : man shall not live by bread alone : thou shalt worship God and him only shalt thou serve.' My brother, that is the trumpet note, and the song of the Lord began with the trumpets. Clear, certain, ringing out unfalteringly, it sounded the loud summons to the battle. And how that battle went in all its fortunes, and how it ended in the triumph of the cross, there is not one of you but knows as well as I do.

I think again our text applies to the history of the Church of Christ. Century after century, unceasingly, that song of the Lord has been lifted up to heaven. It has ascended from the great cathedral, and from the lonely chapel on the moors, and from the sickroom where the heart was weary, and from the arena where the lions were. What wonderful notes have blended into harmony in that magnificent song of the redeemed! Through all the ages it has gone echoing on, and it shall echo till time shall be no more. And here again, when I open my New Testament, and when I read the story of the Acts, I find that if there is one thing clear in the Apostolic Church, it is the sounding out of trumpet music. Do you remember what one said of

Knox's preaching? I think it was the English ambassador who said it. He said that Knox's preaching stirred men more than the sound of five hundred trumpets. Well, when you turn to apostolic days, and read of apostolic testimony there, that is just the impression which it makes. Think of it—a band of humble men, faring forth to the conquest of the world. Their gospel? A Jew who had been crucified. Their hope? That he would come again. And yet these men—with what inspired audacity, with what unwavering and unfaltering confidence, with what magnificent and exultant courage, did they fling themselves on an embattled world! Men took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. What was it that made men sure of that? It was not any learning they displayed, for they were unlearned and ignorant men. Men took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus because of the boldness they exhibited—men heard the trumpet and recognised the captain. I am told that Handel in his oratorios uses the trumpets when God is drawing near. When the trumpets sound, in Handel's oratorios, it is the sign of the approach of deity. And so I recognise that God is near,

in the conquering spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, when I hear the trumpets in the church of Pentecost. My brother, we are far from Pentecost, and I miss the sound of the trumpets in the morning. I miss sometimes the ringing note of confidence which ought to characterise the Church of Christ. I miss the overmastering conviction that what the world needs is a Redeemer, and that

‘Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run.’

Then, too, has not our text its meaning in the drama of our individual life? It applies to your life and to mine. There is a passage in one of the Epistles, which says to the readers, ‘Ye are God’s workmanship.’ But the word has a finer suggestion even than workmanship: what the apostle hints at is ‘Ye are God’s *poems*.’ He means that the life which is given you to live, spite of the failure and the sin of it, is given by God to be a grand sweet song. The stars in their courses sing the song of the Lord—it is what used to be called the music of the spheres. And springtime sings it when the world is green, and the time of the singing of the birds has come

again. But remember that every human life, with its joy and sorrow, its sunshine and its tears —*that* also is fashioned to make melody. It ends, when duty has been bravely done, in music that is beautiful and noble. It ends with a strain, when life has been well lived, that is sweeter than any music of the angels. But when I think of the high hopes of youth, and the gallant enthusiasms of opening manhood, I realise that in life, as in the temple, it is with the trumpet that the song begins. What daring there is in the heart when it is young! What ringing confidence that it can breast the world! What a passion of scorn for the comfort and the ease which have come to mean so much in middle life! And that is one of the offices of youth in a world that is always tending to grow old—it kindles heroism, and sounds the challenge, and rings out upon the night the trumpet note. I have read that when Napoleon was crossing the Alps, his soldiers were almost in despair. They were utterly wearied, and dispirited, and appalled at the perils of the way. Then some one, in a flash of inspiration, suggested that they should sing the Marseillaise, and the Marseillaise made them men again. That is one

of the offices of youth. It sings the Marseillaise upon the Alps. It sounds out, when the world is weary, the note of glorious and rousing cheer. Other music shall be learned in time, richer it may be, and far tenderer, but the song of the Lord begins with the trumpets.

Then, lastly, and in a word or two, may we not apply our text to heaven? For heaven is not only to be a place of rest: heaven is also to be a place of music. You know how much there is that we cannot voice in words which music somehow seems to understand. I have listened to music that echoed and interpreted what I have longed to say and could not say. And so I take it that the heavenly music will just be the power which God will give in glory for saying out at last, in perfect utterance, what ‘we could ne’er express yet could not all conceal.’ If so, how wonderful will be that music! What infinite experience it will convey! It will be the consummation of all melody—the last and grandest song of the Lord. And all of you know how *that* begins, in the sublime and solemn words of Scripture—‘the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be

changed.' In the second part of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, which is not so often read as it might be, Bunyan describes in his own matchless way the death of Mr. Valiant for Truth. He got his summons with this token on it, That his pitcher was broken at the fountain. Then he gave his sword to him who should succeed him, and his courage and skill to him who could get it. And my marks and scars, he said, I carry with me to be my witness that I have fought his battles who will now be my rewarder. So he came to the river, and as he entered it, he said, 'O death, where is thy sting?' and as he went deeper, 'O grave, where is thy victory?' So he passed over, and then, adds Bunyan, in one of his exquisite and immortal touches, *all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.* My brother and sister, when our part is played, God grant we may have a welcome such as that. Life is not easy, and we lose faith sometimes, and we miss the ringing music of the morning. But if we be faithful, and valiant for the truth, some day, with our marks and scars upon us, we too shall hear that note of welcome, and the trumpets shall sound for us upon the other side.

THE LADDER OF PRAYER

Behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven.—Gen. xxviii. 12.

I HAVE already spoken of this memorable scene, and I hope to do so more than once again, but to-day I wish to use the imagery of the verse without direct regard to its associations. In some of our devotional and mystic writers we read of what is called the ladder of prayer.¹ Prayer is regarded as the ascent to God, up which, step by step, the soul is borne. And these devotional and mystic writers, often with great power and penetration, dwell on the separate steps of the ascent that carry the heart upward to the throne. In other words, they show where prayer begins, and to what heights it is capable of rising. They trace its stages, not by formal logic, but by the large experience of men. And

¹ There is a page on the subject in Dr. Steven's *Psychology of the Christian Soul*, a book as suggestive as it is profound.

14 THE LADDER OF PRAYER

it is on that ladder of prayer I should like to dwell this evening, beginning with the lowest step, and so ascending to the higher ones.

Prayer, then, commonly begins with the cry of escape from some external evil. The lowest step on the ladder of the soul is the cry wrung from disaster or adversity. When a man is faced with a dangerous operation, when he finds himself (as in shipwreck) in dire peril, when some one who is very dear to him is ill, or in a situation of great hazard, I say that then there is an instinct of the heart which urges to a cry of help to God, and it is in such a cry that prayer is often born. I was talking not long ago to one of our city merchants, and he told me a little bit of his experience. He told me how he had awakened one morning to find that he had suffered heavy losses, and how that day travelling in a railway carriage with an eminent and honoured Christian, he had begged his companion there and then to pray. I have no doubt that merchant *said* his prayers, in the formal way all of us know; but the real and genuine cry to God was uttered in that hour of overwhelming. And so very often it is through outward trouble, falling on ourselves, or on

our dear ones, that the foot is planted on the lowest step of the ladder which reaches to the throne.

Now it is one sign of what I should venture to call the *humanity* of Holy Scripture, that it preserves for us such a vast store of prayers of this initial kind. The Bible is the great record of the soul, mark you, and such prayers are *not* for blessings of the soul. They are wrung out, not in spiritual darkness, but in some bodily or temporal distress. And yet the Bible is so superbly human in its handling of this life of ours, that it is a very treasury of prayers which some would scarcely reckon prayers at all. It does not ignore them because they are untouched by the deep sense of spiritual alienation. It does not rule them out of the soul's history, because there is in them yet no plea for pardon. It knows our frame—remembers we are dust—is touched like the Lord with the feeling of our infirmities. It welcomes the strong cry, and calls it prayer, that is uttered in disaster and adversity.

This, too, always seems to me to glorify the patience of our Lord. For I suppose that of every ten prayers men made to Jesus, not fewer

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than nine were of this kind. Of course we cannot tell what the disciples asked for in their seasons of sweet and secret intercourse. ‘Teach us to pray,’ ‘We beseech thee show us the Father’—such hints may move us at least to hope the best. But we *do* know that as Jesus moved about, and men drew near to him, and cried to him, nine times out of ten the things they cried for could scarcely be called spiritual at all. They prayed for sight. They prayed for physical power. They prayed that a son or daughter might be healed. They prayed in the wild uproar of the storm, ‘Lord save us from this tempest, or we perish.’ And what I say is that for one like Jesus, to whom the spiritual overshadowed everything, such ceaseless praying for the physical and temporal must have made heavier the cross he bore. It deepens the wonder of his patience to remember that. It sheds a light on his infinite compassion. Fain would he have been asked for deeper things, yet he never wearied in bestowing these things. And so may we learn that in the ear of God those cries, which are but the rudiments of prayer, are neither rejected nor despised.

That, then, is the first step on the ladder, and

now above it there is another step. It is the stage when prayer for outward help becomes a cry for deliverance from sin. In the first outbreak of appeal to heaven there is scarcely any consciousness of sin. There is no thought of anything but the calamity which has befallen us or some one who is dear. But slowly, as a man prays for help, there steals on him the strange conviction that he needs something deeper than assistance, and that in the sight of God he is a sinner. It would lead us far beyond our bounds to-day to consider how the sense of sin is born. It is created by the Holy Spirit in ways that oftentimes defy analysis. Yet this, I think, is very largely true, that when a man prays in trouble or adversity, gradually there is awakened in him the feeling that he is a sinner. I have heard people who have had to suffer greatly say, 'What a sinner I must have been, when God has sent me this.' Now of course, in the light of the words of Jesus, they were unwarranted in saying that. Still, it betrayed that lurking sense to which few, I take it, are quite strangers, that when suffering falls on us, or those we love, not far off from the suffering is guilt. I wonder if a

father ever saw his child suffer without some dark suspicion of that kind. Childish pain not only excites pity; it has a strange way of getting at the conscience. When some one dear to us has got to suffer greatly, and we begin to pray for them in secret, we find ourselves crying, ere we close, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' It is thus that prayer, in the ordering of God, rises to what is called the second stage. Born in the need of help in some dark hour, it passes onward to the need of pardon. It deepens into prayer for forgiveness; for the inward cleansing of the heart; for deliverance, through the grace of God, from the sin that doth so easily beset us.

I want you here to note in passing how often Jesus sought to deepen prayer so. He took prayer by the hand, if I might put it thus, and led it upward to this higher step. Men came to him and asked for something physical; Christ lent a willing ear to them, and answered them. They asked for sight, and Jesus gave them sight; they asked for bodily health, and he bestowed it. But you know how often when he bestowed such gifts—when he answered the prayer for outward things like these—he turned the thought

of the sufferer to *six*. ‘Go,’ he would say to them, ‘and sin no more.’ Was it merely a word of warning for the future? I do not think you exhaust the thought of Jesus when you narrow it in any way like that. He was leading men into that deeper life which can never be satisfied with outward blessings, but which feels, in the very bestowal of such benefits, the need of pardon and release from sin. That, then, is the second step of prayer, and God, I think, brings most of us to that. We are no longer crying wildly heavenward, as in some shipwreck or calamity. We are crying for a clean heart and a right spirit; we are crying, ‘Against thee, thee only have we sinned’; and to every such true cry is given the answer, ‘Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow.’

Well, now we pass on to the third stage in the upward progress of the life of prayer, for we come to find that deliverance is not everything, if we are to walk in well-pleasing before God. Our Saviour spoke of a house that was swept and garnished, and yet it became the dwelling-place of devils. If it was to be the home of light and love, it needed something more than cleansing.

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And so do men waken, when they have prayed for pardon, to their abiding need of something more than pardon, if they are to be clothed in the comeliness of love. There are virtues that they must achieve. There are graces that they must attain. Patience is needed, and courage, and control, if they are to walk in the light as he is in the light. And so prayer rises from the cry for pardon into the range and compass of petition, and becomes the daily appeal of the endeavouring soul for needed virtue and for needed grace. It is true that our Father knows what things we need, before one syllable of prayer has left the lip. But Christ, who told us that, has told us also that the Father delights to have his children asking. And the fact is that in such holy mysteries there is little to be gained by argument; it is far wiser, in a childlike trust, to accept the perfect leadership of Jesus. ‘Ask, and it shall be given unto you; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.’ We must *still* ask—we must *still* knock—though our Father knows the things that we have need of. And hence it is that in the Christian life there is such a range of petitionary prayer, from the lowliest virtue that the weakest needs, to the loftiest

grace that can adorn the saint. We are a long way now from the wild cry that rises in some season of disaster. We are breathing a different, though not a diviner, air than in the moment when our one thought was pardon. We have risen into a life of need which is wide as the mercy and the grace of God, and that is the third step upon the ladder.

Now if you will turn back in thought, and survey the road that we have travelled, you will find that all the stages mentioned have at least one common element. What is that element? Well, it is this. It is the presence in them all of *self*. It is the stealing of self on to the scene, in the solemn moment of approach to God. Mark you, I do not say such prayers are selfish. To say that were to misinterpret everything. A man is *not* selfish because he prays for healing, or because he asks God for some peculiar grace. All I say is that in these prayer-stages, sometimes with far more insistence than at other times, there is felt, in every approach to God, the presence, if not the pressure, of the self. Now the question is: Is there no prayer possible where self shall be utterly

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forgotten? Is there no prayer where the very thought of self shall be lost and hidden and absorbed in God? If there be such, then prayer is at its highest, and we have reached the topmost step upon the ladder, which rises from the Bethel where we rest, and reaches to the glory of the throne.

The answer is, such prayer is not only possible, but is within the grasp of every one of us. It is born when a man has learned to look to God, and to say with his whole heart, 'Thy will be done.' There is no longer any thought of *our* will; our will is merged in the sweet will of God. Through light and shadow, gladness and adversity, the perfect will of God is being wrought. And so each day, not choosing for ourselves, we take what God in his infinite wisdom sends us, and our life becomes a prayer, 'Thy will be done.' We do not ask to see the distant scene now. We do not blindly insist on *this* or *that*. We do not repine when blessings are denied us, or because there is sorrow where we had looked for joy. We have ceased to think that we know what we most need. We have ceased to think we can direct our steps. Through all that is sent to us, and all we have to

do, our one prayer is, ‘Thy will be done.’ There may be many a struggle before that stage is reached. There was struggle for Jesus before that stage was reached—‘If it be possible, let this cup pass from me : nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.’ But *when* it is reached, then there is perfect peace, and a new light on everything that happens ; and self, which even in our petitions vexed us, passes in music out of sight. *That* is the highest reach of prayer, when it is grasped in the fulness of its meaning. That is something nobler than petition. It is communion with the Father of all spirits. It is the voicing of the passion to obey, whether obedience be hard or pleasant, and without obedience there can be no religion.

In closing let me make two remarks on this, the last and highest stage in prayer. And the first is that it is at this stage that joy in prayer commonly begins. There are many who pray, and pray with regularity, who have never experienced joy in prayer. They hold to the practice from a sense of duty, but it is a duty to which they have to force themselves. Knowing how surely the omission of secret prayer leads to unguardedness and unbelief, they cling to it in the

dark with fine fidelity. Now it would take me far beyond my theme this evening to discuss generally the lack of joy in prayer. But perhaps the commonest of all causes of that absence is to be found along the lines I have been indicating. I question if there is ever joy in prayer when men come to the Father wanting their *own way*. That joy is born when they have learned to come, wanting nothing but the way of God. It is then there comes sweet peace into the soul. It is then we learn that no evil can befall us. It is then we find, through fair and foul, that underneath are the everlasting arms. And this is such a wonderful discovery, in a life so difficult and intricate as ours, that it brings the ransomed of the Lord to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.

And the other remark which I would make is this, that we owe it to Christ that all of us can pray so. It is Christ who has made it possible, even for the weakest, to reach this highest stage of prayer. If God were an unknown ruler in the distance, only a hero could pray, 'Thy will be done.' If he were but a Spirit of omnipotence, such prayer would take far stronger faith than

ours. But Christ has taught us that God is our Heavenly Father, and that he loves us with a perfect love, and that the very hairs of our head are numbered, and that he willeth not that any man should perish. Given a character of God like *that*, it is not impossible to pray, ‘Thy will be done.’ We pray in the childlike and Christ-given confidence that in the will of God there is our highest good. And there we leave it, not seeing what it means perhaps, for now we know in part and see in part ; but quietly certain that the day is coming when we shall say ‘He hath done all things well.’



THE SELECTIVE POWER OF PERSONALITY

Unto the pure all things are pure.—*Titus i. 15.*

IT would be an interesting but a melancholy study to consider the texts of Scripture which have been misapplied. It would not only illuminate many a heresy; it would lead also to the secret springs of conduct. Some misapplications we should group together as arising from the imperfections of our version. Others we should find taking their rise in the sinful bias of the will. Others rather owe their origin to the proverbial character of certain words of Scripture, and to the constant tendency of men to use proverbs in a mistaken way. It takes more wit to use a proverb wisely than it took originally to coin that proverb. It is far easier to strike out an apothegm than in some complex moment to apply it. Hence is it that certain words of Scripture (and our text to-night

is one of them) are in real danger of misapplication.

Have we not all heard these words misapplied? The commonest misuse of them is this. Something offensive has been spoken, something coarse or allusively indecent, and one of the company with a hot heart has protested against the evil utterance; whereon immediately, sometimes with a smile, oftener with the suspicion of a sneer, he is told that unto the pure all things are pure. The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose, and such a citation is the devil's handiwork. Our text does *not* mean that good and evil have their being in our thoughts about them. There are things that are everywhere and always right, and there are things that are everywhere and always wrong, and there is little hope for any man who has learned to tamper with these fixities. A deadly fever is not less infectious because I am fortified against it by some antidote. It is still deadly, in its inherent virulence, though I may be immune against its ravages. So were every mind as pure as the unsullied snow upon the Alps, there would still be things that were indecent. In a bare and literal sense it is not true that unto the

pure all things are pure. Unto the pure, till the last trumpet sounds, there will be words and actions that are horrible. It is that conviction which inspires the home, and gives stability to nations, and when it is lost, in a degenerate charity, the day of moral decadence has come.

What then is the true meaning of our text? Well, it is something of this kind. It is the inspired if proverbial expression of the selective power of personality. Everything with which we come in contact carries a large diversity of meaning. There is nothing we meet with in our common walk but is capable of different interpretations. And how we shall interpret all that wealth, and what we shall see in it as it steals by, all that is really fixed by what we are. By all the influences that played on us in childhood, and all the activities of our maturer years, by every battle we have quietly fought, and every burden we have bravely borne, by the unhindered trend of leisure thought, by temptation, by friendship, by religion, you and I, whether for weal or woe, have forged out our personality. It is the only thing that we possess really, yet it is something more than a possession. It is by that, and that alone, that we

interpret everything around us. All the wonder of the sky and sea, all the experience of light and shadow, all the countless activities of life, are accepted and interpreted by that. It is not in the light of the wisdom of the ages that you and I read the drama on life's stage. For few men have ever learned that wisdom ; and those who have, have learned it all too late. It is in the light of all we have made ourselves in quiet years and immemorial days, when we prayed God to give us strength to stand, or yielded to the importunity of sin. By *that* we see—by *that* we read—by *that* we interpret God and man and everything. That is the key which unlocks every door opening on to the riches of the universe. And that, I take it, was in the apostle's mind when, brooding deep upon this life of ours, he said, moved by the Holy Ghost, unto the pure all things are pure.

Now let us carry that thought into one or two spheres, and first let us think of *nature*. One of the noblest odes in literature is the ode of Coleridge written at sunrise at Chamounix. The poet is gazing upwards at the Alps, and he hears a mighty song of praise to God. The torrent praises him ; the eagle praises him ; the forest

of pine and the snowy summit praise him. There is no discord in that mighty chorus—‘earth with her thousand voices praises God.’ But now there comes reeling on to that same scene some poor drunkard with his sodden brain. And the same torrents are sounding in his ears, and the same peaks are white against the heaven. But for him, ruined by his vice, and fashioned by his past into a beast, neither in cataract nor snow nor forest is there heard one syllable of heaven. Both look on the same mystic dawn moving on tiptoe where man hath never trod ; both hear the rush and swirl of the one river that hurries from the everlasting snow. And to one it is the echo of that song which was sung in the high heaven when Christ was born ; to the other it is the echo of despair. In other words, faced by this wondrous world, you and I always get just what we bring. We see its power and glory *through* the eye, but never do we see them *with* the eye. We see them with all that we have made ourselves—with every coveting and every conquering—with every virtue that has been wrestled for, and every passion that has been brought to heel. That is why places which speak to one of peace, speak to

another of sinful opportunity. That is why sky and sea to one are paradise, and to another are but air and water. That is why, in apostolic thought, sublimely careless of misinterpretation, unto the pure all things are pure.

The same thought also applies to *language* just as truly as it applies to nature. Through all the range of it, language is coloured by the abiding mystery of what we are. It might well seem to the casual observer that there were few things more fixed and definite than words. The fact that there are such books as dictionaries argues for the stability of words. And yet those words, which we are always using, and which seem fixed and rigid as the hills—there is scarce one of them but is affected subtly by this tremendous fact of personality. In every term we use there is some shade of meaning which has never quite been caught by other men. There is some suggestion that is all our own, whether it be a high suggestion or an evil one. And the point is that all that verbal colouring, which gives to our words an individuality, springs from the kind of life we have experienced, and the character we have been forging in the dark. It is in that sense I under-

stand our Lord when he says that by our words we shall be judged. If we are but drawing on a common stock, I can find in our words no principle of judgement. But if on the common language that we use we cast the shadow of our deepest self, then in our words, when all the books are opened, there will be more of revelation than we dream. It is a truth of widest application that the style is the man. It is true of Shakespeare and of Browning, but it is also true of you and me. We take the words the dictionary gives us, and then we so mould them by our secret self, that the day is coming, if Christ is to be credited, when by our words we shall be judged. To put it otherwise, all mastery of language is at the heart of it a moral business. It is not merely an artistic victory; it is a moral and spiritual victory. He who has conquered words and made them serve him, so that they throng to him in power and beauty, has conquered things more powerful than words in the secret battle-places of the soul. Behind the glory of the words of Ruskin lies the moral enthusiasm of Ruskin. There is the pressure of a dauntless courage in the superb carelessness of Walter Scott. And who does not feel,

in reading Stevenson, the presence of these very qualities which made that life of his, with all its suffering, such a quietly heroic thing. Unto the pure all things are pure. It is the inward self that shapes the instrument. It casts its shadow whether for weal or woe on the universal heritage of speech. And that is why—let me again repeat it—when the day of reckoning is come, we are told, by One who ought to know, that by our words we shall be judged.

Now if that be largely true of all speech, it is especially true of the great words we use. It is true, for instance, in a very solemn way of the greatest of all words, *God*. In the Shorter Catechism, when we were children, we learned the answer to the question, ‘What is God?’ Some of us can repeat that answer still, and it would be hard to match in its sublimity. Yet it is not the light of any catechism that has lit up for us the name of God ; it is the light of the life we have experienced since we were cradled at our mother’s knee. I knew a little girl in an East country orphanage who would never sing a hymn with *Father* in it. Her father had been a drunken ruffian, and in her wretched home he

used to beat her. And she had taken all that childish sorrow, and she had carried it up into the gates of heaven, so that for her there was a cry of terror in the sweetest and tenderest name of God. It is thus that that great name is moulded for us. It is coloured by the hand of memory. It comes to us impoverished and enriched by all that home has been, and all that church has been. The light of all our friendships is upon it, and all the love that has met us as we journeyed, and all the decisions we have taken, and all the sorry refusals we have made. That is why *God* to one means everything ; that is why to another it means nothing. That is why to one it is a name of terror, and to another of infinite encouragement. No definition of the wisest catechism shall ever tell what God is to the soul. It is the soul itself which answers that.

Passing from language, I would note again that the same thought applies to *human life*. In the selective power of personality is the secret of our estimate of conduct. It is one of the commands of the New Covenant—‘ Judge not, that ye be not judged.’ That is a warning which we all need against censorious or hasty judgements. But you

must remember that Christ never meant, by these words, to disapprove of the faculty of judgement ; as a matter of fact we are so constituted that each of us is judging all the time. Every action, whether small or great, is summoned imperiously to our judgement-bar. Swiftly, instinctively, unhesitatingly, we pronounce sentence on it there. We do it every day a hundred times, and do it we *must* if we are to be men, for it is that faculty of moral judgement which separates us from the beasts that perish. Now there are certain acts so clearly good that the worst of men cannot but admire them ; and there are other acts so clearly bad that they are universally condemned. But in between these two extremes lies a whole world of effort and accomplishment, and how we shall judge all that, when it confronts us, depends on the deep fact of what we are. There is nothing that reaches us but has its contact with the life which is lying hidden in the soul. It touches secret forms of hope and passion which we thought were dead, but which were only sleeping. And it is all that hope, and all that passion, and all the complex whole that we call self, which passes sentence on the acts of men as they rise up for

judgement in the gate. In other words, when we are judging others we are passing silent judgement on ourselves. Things will be mean to us if we are mean. Things will be great to us if we be great. By all we have struggled for with many a failure, by every ideal we have lost or won, by hidden lust, by secret sham, do we interpret the drama of mankind. Give me a man who has lived for ten years purely, and he shall find purity on every hand. Give me a man whose life has been a mockery, and all the world shall be a mockery to him. In every sneer, in every commendation, in every word of praise or word of blame, we are but registering what we have made of life since our feet were on the uplands of the dawn. There came a poor woman once, with hair dishevelled, and she anointed the feet of Christ with ointment. Do you remember how diversely that act was viewed by the guests who were reclining at the table? To One of them it was a deed of love that was to be told wherever the gospel should be preached ; to another it was the wild extravagance of an impulsive and abandoned woman. Both looked on the same vase of alabaster ; both watched the moving of the same

white fingers ; but the one who looked upon the deed was Judas, and the other was the Son of God. And in their looks, swift as a swallow's flight—different from each other as night from day—there is a glimpse into that awful gulf which parted the betrayer from his Lord. Unto the pure all things are pure. We see by all that we have made ourselves. If we have lived disloyally like Judas, then shall we look upon a sorry spectacle. But if it has been 'the utmost for the highest,' as it was with him whom we adore, then may we also catch the gleam of splendour in the ointment lavished on the feet.

In closing I ask you to observe that we have here one secret of social influence. I want you to write that upon your hearts to-day, when there is so much talk of social duty. It is a well-known fact that just to see the best has a strange power of calling out the best. Arnold of Rugby believed so in his boys that they grew ashamed to tell a lie to him. Men have a curious and subtle way of answering to our expectations of them, so that oftentimes they will act nobly, because they are assured we think them noble. To see the finest, in a world like this, is a sure

way of evoking what is fine. It was in such a confidence that Jesus worked in his mighty task of bringing in the kingdom. If then we have power by what we see, and if what we see depends on what we are, I say that the most urgent of all social duties is the duty of a man to his own soul. I have no faith in any social service that springs from careless and unworthy character. There cannot be any vision in such service, and without vision service is in vain. We need a heart that scorns what is contemptible, and clings to the highest in the grimdest fashion, if men and women are to feel the touch that helps them to be better than themselves. Unto the pure all things are pure. We see the best, and help to make it so. Every victory we win alone is aiding our brother to be a better man. Say not you can do nothing for your fellows; you can do more for your fellows than many a noisy demagogue, by being patient, loyal, true, and pure in the life which no human eye can see.

THE MINISTRY OF INTERRUPTION

He divideth the sea with his power.—Job xxvi. 12.

WITH every separate and individual soul God has his separate and individual dealings. There are touches in the discipline of every man to which nowhere is there any replica. Just as each face is different from all others, and every finger-print has its own impress, so is there something peculiar and distinctive in the divine handling of every human soul—some mark of grace so personal and private, some chastisement so exquisitely fitting, that in no other life is it repeated. Perhaps that is what is meant in the Apocalypse when it speaks of the mystery of the white stone. On that stone a name is to be written which no man knoweth save he who receiveth it. And that may indicate that it will voice the past in such an intimate and private way, that *we* shall know in a flash what is intended, although to other eyes it may be meaningless.

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But if God has his personal and peculiar handlings, he also has his large and general dealings. He has his ministries which all experience, and through experiencing which they become brothers. As the whole garden lies in the same sunshine, and all its flowers are watered by one rain, so human souls, all different from each other, are fed and fostered by certain common ministries. Each has its own secret of the Lord, yet each has something which is a common dower, and through which men understand each other when they tell of what the Lord hath done for them. One of these ministries is gentle patience ; another is unexpected goodness. A third is trial, and the touch of suffering, and the strength that is made perfect in our weakness. But the one on which I wish to speak to-night, for I have been thinking much about it lately, is the divine ministry of interruption.

There is for instance the interruption of the night, when the shadows fall and when the stars come out. Man goeth forth to his labour in the morning, and in the evening he has to lay it by. It matters not what his life's task may be. It may be ploughing a field ; it may be selling merchandise.

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It may be, with Shakespeare, writing for all time. It may be, with Raphael, painting for eternity. But when the night comes, and the need of sleep, though the hand is supple and the brain on fire, hand and brain must leave it and be still. Then there is the interruption of suffering, when we are laid aside by sickness for a season—often at the very time of life when we would give anything to ply our duty. And we fight against it, for we would be doing, and in our obstinate heroism we disregard advice : but God is not so easily disregarded. Now had we been sent here just to suffer, such intervals might be easily explained. But I do not think that we are here to suffer ; we are here to do our task, and do it well. And yet how often, right in the midst of work, we have to loosen our grip upon the task, and lay ourselves down, and let ourselves be tended, feeling we are helpless as a child. There is the interruption of our sleep, then, and there is the interruption of our sicknesses. And then to us all, relentless and inexorable, comes the interruption of the grave—sometimes when the task is just begun, and the hand is only awakening to its cunning ; and sometimes when the palace is all

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perfected, save for the touch without which all seems vain.

Now on this discipline of interruption there are two remarks I want to make in passing. And the first is, that among all God's children man on earth alone is subject to it. We do not know much of life beyond the grave, whether in its gladness or its woe. But certain glimpses are given us in Scripture, when the veil is lifted as for a single instant. And always, when that veil is lifted, there is one feature impressed upon the scene—it is an energy for good or evil that for ever and for ever is unceasing. There is no night in heaven, nor is there any sickness. There is no more any experience of death. Without the interruption of one hour is carried on the service of the angels. And whatever be the misery of the lost—and I discard the crudities of barbarism—at least you have the word of Christ for *this*, that the worm dieth not, and the flame is never quenched. It is thus evident that when death comes the ministry of interruption ceases. Cherubim and seraphim know nothing of it. It is beyond the horizon of the glorified. Therefore you see that if it has any meaning, and every

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ministry of God has meaning, it must have peculiar and exclusive reference to the conditions of our earthly life.

The other remark which I would make is this, that it presses the harder the more we are in earnest. If life be aimless and if days be empty, it matters little how we are interrupted. When a man is sauntering of an afternoon, to be interrupted may be actually pleasant ; but if that same man is running for a prize, you had better not cry to him to halt a moment. And the more earnestly we take our life, and feel that it is a race and not a sauntering, the more do we fret, and sometimes nobly fret, at the divine insistence upon interruption. Let me then try to explain to you to-night some of the deep meanings of this mystery. There is much in it we cannot understand, of course, for now we see in part and know in part. Still there is always something we can learn when we meditate upon these ways of God, and I am here to speak of them, because perhaps I have thought on them a little more than you.

First, then, by the ministry of interruption God wakens us to the value of time.

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When I was in Thurso I had a beautiful manse which looked right across the Pentland Firth to Orkney. It was some thirteen miles across to Orkney, and nothing but the sea lay in between. When strangers came, I used to ask them how far they thought it was across to Orkney ; and sometimes they would reply that it was four miles, and one lady was convinced that it was fifty. Had anything interrupted that broad level, the eye would have had its standard of comparison. But there was nothing—not a single headland—not a single sail upon the sea. And as it is with the extent of space, so is it, I take it, with the flight of time—it is by interruptions that we reckon it. When a river is silent it is hard to tell with what rapidity it may be flowing. But hurl a rock into the river bed, and by the resistance you shall tell at once. And so into the tenor of our days God in his mercy hurls these interruptions, and we awaken to the flight of time. When Mary Lamb, that wise and gentle woman, used to be visited by her fits of madness, Charles would go with her (and both in tears) to the place where she would be tended for a season. And then you will find him

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writing in his letters, 'Ah, how hard these interruptions are, with the few years at most that we can have together.' Living with Mary in the most perfect comradeship, the days were ' swift and of a silken sound.' Separated by the act of God, he thrilled to think how the years were going by. And so did these interruptions deepen him, as God intends that they should do with all, for the Holy Ghost is saying *to-day*. **W**ere there no night to stop us in our toil, how the enthusiasm of toil might vanish ! Were there no sickness, how many men there are who would never have risen to redeem the time ! **W**ere there no death, with his uplifted hand, stopping the traffic of this mystic thoroughfare, we might have squandered over a thousand years what now we accomplish in three score years and ten. In the world beyond there shall be no more time, and therefore interruption is unneeded. **H**ere it is time which is the stuff of life, as it is life which is the stuff of destiny. And that, I think, was in the mind of Jesus when he said, '**W**ork while it is called to-day, for the night cometh when no man can work.'

Next, by this ministry of interruption, God

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checks the force of evil in the world. It is one of his ways, if I may put it so, to lessen the momentum of the bad. When a train is running two or three hundred miles, and the way is clear, and there is not one stop, with what resistless speed does it rush forward, through towns that flash for a moment and are gone! But on some little local district railway, where there are stations every mile or two, you scarcely look for such a speed as that. The stoppages alone make it impossible. They interrupt the gathering of speed. Just when the train is getting under weigh, *there* is the signal, and the train must stop. So with the evil in the human heart—were the line clear, how awful the momentum; and God prohibits that by interruption. That is one great ministry of sleep. It is one of the sweet offices of sleep. Have you been bitter at any one to-day? Or have you been jealous or envious or lustful? Then comes the night, and you are hushed to rest, and you lie like a child in the eternal keeping, and all that is foul in you is interrupted. It does not go driving through the darkness with you. It is stopped at the lonely station of the night. Sunk in oblivion, the bitterest heart ceases to be bitter for

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a season. And what I say is that that nightly check on the ten thousand sins of poor humanity is far more mighty than we sometimes think in keeping sin from driving us to ruin. With every morning we must begin afresh. We must take up all our bitterness again. With the deliberate act of a bad will we must resume our hatred in the morning. And while of course that is always possible, yet I thank God that in a general way men are ashamed in the pure morning light of all that fretted them, and festered, yesterday. Without that break, how might each spark of hell glow until it broke into a flame ! Without that break in tragic continuity, what hope could any mortal have of conquering ? So by the interruption of the night, and of sickness, and of the coming grave, does God check the momentum of the bad.

Again by the ministry of interruption does not God impart a certain charm to life ? It is his exquisite and chosen method of giving us the joy of new beginnings. If life were nothing but a prolonged *to-day*, we may conjecture that it would be intolerable. For golden days are but as angels' visits, and of our common days we make a sorry tangle. But there is always *to-morrow*, God be

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praised, and things are to be different to-morrow ; and so do we take heart and hope again because a kindly heaven interrupts. When Francis of Assisi had been ill, and when his strength was creeping back to him, he tells us how he left the Italian town, and climbed the hill, and looked upon the fields. And never, he tells us, was the grass so beautiful, nor the song of birds so wonderful to him, as when he saw and heard them once again after the interruption of his sickness. That was six or seven hundred years ago. Is it not the same to-day ? When is the world so fresh, so fair, so wonderful, as when we look on it again after an illness ? With what a zest we turn to our old books ! With what a gladness we see the old familiar faces ! The commonest blessings that we lightlied once are sparkling now as in the dew of May. I have often thought that heaven will be more bright because of the interruption of the grave. I do not want to enter it like Enoch. I do not want to reach it like Elijah. I want to sleep, and then to waken fresh in all the thrill and tingle of the morning, and so will the land be wonderful to me.

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Lastly by this ministry of interruption God shows us there are larger plans than ours. He teaches us there is a wider ordering than we should have dreamed of had we been unchecked. All of you who love the Firth of Clyde are familiar with what geologists call trap-dykes. They are these walls of rock, only a few feet wide sometimes, standing up grim and stern upon the shore. And sometimes they are pillar-like in structure, and often they are fantastically riven, and always they are a danger to the boatman. Jagged and gaunt, they interrupt the strata, and, interrupting, tell of hidden forces. They are the children of elemental fires, deep hidden, where no human eye can pierce. So we, whose life is but a shore on which the waves of eternity are breaking, have our interruptions just like that. Uninterrupted, we should be self-contained. We should recognise no ordering but our own. Pressing forward, without one single check, no will would emerge except the will of man. And it is then that God flames forth in power, and interrupts, and cuts athwart the strata, and lo, 'there's a divinity doth shape our ends, rough hew them how we will.' I 'have

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known men who, when they lost some loved one, felt as if their life were in collapse. All they had ever toiled for seemed but vanity ; all that they had lived for but a house of cards. And yet to these same men, as the days passed, has come the dawning of a larger order, that had room in it for death as well as life. So are we wakened by our interruptions to something mightier than human will. Some one is thwarting us—some one is checking us—and clouds and darkness are around his throne. What is that mysterious power to you ? Shall I tell you what it is to me? It is the God whom I have learned in Christ ; and I can trust him, for his name is love.

THE LIMITS OF LIBERTY

All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient.
—*1 Cor. vi. 12.*

It has been said by some one, I forget by whom, that a Christian has no rights, he has only duties. That is a very striking statement, and seems to sound the note of the heroic. Now in a loose and popular way, there may be some justification for that statement. It may have served its purpose as a word of warning to men who were always insisting on their rights. But for all that it should never have been spoken, whatever purposes it may have served, for it is utterly antagonistic to the spirit of the gospel of our Lord. If there is one thing Paul insists on more than another, it is the rights of the believer in Christ Jesus. He argues with a passionate intensity for the liberties of every Christian. Never is his style so animated, never so bold and luminous

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his thought, as when he fights the battle for his converts of their liberties in Jesus Christ. He knew that everything depended upon it, that the very life of the church depended on it. On it depended whether the church of Christ was to stand out, or to be lost in Judaism. And so, sometimes by appeal to the Old Testament and always on the large ground of grace, he appeals to his hearers to stand fast in the liberty where-with Christ had made them free.

But then, following hard on this insistence, and in some measure just because of it, we soon come to detect in the apostle the presence and pressure of another thought. Just as you have right through the Old Testament tremendous insistence on the awfulness of God, and then when God has been safeguarded so, the revelation of Christ that God is love; so in Paul you have first the splendid doctrine of the inalienable liberties of every Christian, and then the limitation of these liberties. So far from it being the case that a Christian has no rights, there is no man with rights so incontestable. They are to be cherished at whatever cost, and in the teeth of angriest opposition. But then, having insisted upon that,

with all the emphasis of inspiration, Paul, with his wonderful knowledge of the heart, flashes light on the dangers of that liberty. All things are lawful to me, but all are not expedient. A Christian is one who is willing to forego. He uses his liberties as not abusing them ; he recognises limits in their exercise. And it is on these limits of our Christian liberty—limits, mark you, always self-imposed—that I wish to speak for a little while this evening. Such limits, as I understand my Testament, are determined by one or other of three interests.

In the first place our liberty is limited in the interests of our personal safety.

There is a passage in one of the Epistles which says, ‘Touch not ; taste not ; handle not.’ I know no passage in the Scripture that is oftener misunderstood than that one. It has been quoted as inspired direction to those who were yielding to temptation. It has been used as the motto of abstinence societies, as though it embodied apostolic counsel. Whereas as a matter of fact, if you read the passage carefully, you will find that the very opposite is true : these are the words of Paul’s antagonists, and against their

view of life he is in arms. *The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof*—that is the ringing note of the apostle. There is nothing in it common or unclean : everything is to be received with thanksgiving. But then, having uttered that grand truth, which we must never forfeit for any popular clamour, Paul proceeds to limit it in exercise by the consideration of his immortal wellbeing. All things are lawful to me, says the apostle, but I will not be brought under the power of any. I will not let anything usurp dominion over this temple of the Holy Ghost. In other words, this brave and thoughtful man, who insisted so passionately on his rights in Christ, deliberately limited these rights in the interest of his individual safety. I know few sentences in literature more touching than the closing sentence of the ninth chapter here. ‘I keep under my body,’ says the apostle, ‘lest I myself should be a castaway.’ I keep under my body is our version, but the word in the original is far more graphic. It is a word borrowed from the prize-ring : it means, I beat my body black and blue. Now whatever Paul was, he was no ascetic, and certainly he never preached asceticism.

I can imagine the scorn he would have poured on the wild asceticism of the Middle Ages. Yet here, lest he should be a castaway, lest he should be rejected at the end, deliberately, and in sternest fashion, he limited his large liberty in Christ. Think of it—this great apostle haunted with fears of being cast away : never quite sure of himself—never quite certain that he might not be tripped some day and overthrown ! It seems incredible ; and yet to Paul it was so far from being incredible, that he crushed his body down in terror of it. ‘Stand fast therefore,’ he says to the Galatians, ‘in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free.’ Cherish as a principle that is inestimable the fulness of your liberties in Christ. But then remember that you are only human, and weak, and very liable to fall, and use your liberty as not abusing it.

Now as that was the apostle’s practice, so it ought to be the practice of all Christians. It is along these lines that in Christ Jesus we ought to seek to regulate our lives. There are many who would exalt into a principle what may be only a salutary safeguard. There are many on the other hand who in the name of liberty pave

their way to misery and ruin. But he who is wise—he who is taught of God—will be careful to avoid these two extremes, for neither of them has the mind of Christ. On the one hand, he will assert his liberty. He will say all things are lawful unto me. He will give no place in the charter of his rights to the touch not and the taste not and the handle not. But then recalling the awful possibility that in his voyage he should be cast away, he will impose upon himself stern limitations. He will remember how the best have fallen, and fallen tragically in unexpected ways ; he will remember that life is full of peril, and that for the surest foot the ground is slippery ; and so in the interests of individual safety—and we cannot afford to trifle with our safety—he will say all things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient.

And may I say in passing that such action is in full accord with the teaching of our Lord. I say it because there are so many nowadays who want to distinguish between Paul and Jesus. Now it is true that through the life of Christ there breathes the spirit of most glorious freedom. Think of his teaching on the Sabbath, for

example : think of him at the marriage feast at Cana. There is a geniality, if I may put it so—a human breadth in his teaching and example, which has no better witness than just this, that it made every Pharisee indignant. All that is gloriously true, yet remember that this is also true. Never was there a teacher sent from God who could be so stern and severe as Jesus Christ. It was not the ardent and impetuous Paul—it was the gentle and genial Saviour, who said, ‘ If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off ; if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out.’ Is there anything radically bad in the right hand? It is the organ that I stretch out in prayer. Is there anything radically evil in the eye? God has made it, and what he made is good. And yet, according to the word of Jesus, the hour may come when for a man’s own safety it were wise to forfeit the gladness of the eye, and cut away the glory of the hand. Mark you, if thy right hand offend *thee*—there is no talk of anybody else. It is in the interests of a man’s own life that he must use this drastic limitation. And so you see Paul is but echoing what he had learned from his Redeemer, when he says, in the interests of personal

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safety all things are lawful, but all are not expedient.

In the second place, our liberty is limited in the interests of Christian brotherhood.

The classical instance of this Christian attitude is found in this first Epistle to the Corinthians. It is so interesting and so significant that you will bear with me if I give it in detail. The apostle pictures a Corinthian Christian invited to dinner by a friend. That friend is a heathen man, and in comparatively humble life. Now in the food that was set upon the table it was almost certain there would be temple meat : meat, that is, of beasts that had been sacrificed, and then sold to the market by the priests. And the difficulty for the Christian guest was this, was he at liberty to eat that meat? If it had been offered to idols in the temple, would not eating it mean fellowship with idols? It was about that difficulty that they wrote to Paul, and his answer is supremely noble. Go to your dinner, he says, and ask no questions. Eat what is set before you and be thankful. If you start worrying about things like *that*, you will do conscience irreparable mischief. *The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.*

But now suppose that next that Christian brother there is sitting another and a weaker Christian. He is struggling to be true to Christ, but the pull of the old life is terrible. And he turns to his stronger brother by his side, and he says to him anxiously, ‘That is temple meat.’ The question was (and it was a daily question) what was the stronger brother to do then? If he partook, his neighbour might partake, and that might be opening the gate to ruin. He would go home beset by the dark sense that he was again in fellowship with devils. But, on the other hand, if he did *not* partake, out of consideration for that weaker conscience, what became of his liberty in Christ? So they wrote to Paul about that also, and I think you know how he replied. As a Christian man, he said, it is your bounden duty to consider the weakness of your brother. Knit into fellowship by Jesus Christ, called to the bearing of each other’s burdens, God forbid that you should use your liberty to offend one of these little ones. Mark you, there is no word of personal safety now. The stronger brother was perfectly secure. For him an idol was nothing in the world, and he could eat and drink

with a good conscience. The only question was, how would his action tell on the tempted and weak Christian by his side, and Paul says *that* is to be determinative. It might be very annoying to be hampered so. One might regard his neighbour as a nuisance. It was hard that a man should not enjoy himself, because he had a weakling looking on. And it is then that Paul, in that great way of his, lifts up the matter into such an atmosphere that the man who is tempted to fret at his restrictions, bows his head in shame. Have you forgotten, says the apostle, that for that weak brother Jesus died? Have you forgotten that Christ endured for him the agony and the anguish of the Cross? Compared with *that*, how infinitely little is any sacrifice that you are called to make in the restriction of your Christian liberty.

And so we are taught this second lesson about the limits of our Christian rights. We are bound to limit them not only for our own sakes ; we are bound to limit them for our brother's sake. No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. If we believe in the Fatherhood of God, then we believe in the brotherhood of

man. And only he has got the mind of Christ to whom that thought of brotherhood is regulative, not only in the exercise of power, but also in the exercise of liberty. There are many things in life that are quite lawful, and on whose lawfulness we must insist. There are things that you and I could practise safely, and be all the happier for our practice of them. But if to our brother they be fraught with peril, and if they make it harder for him to do the right, then for our brother's sake, if we be Christians, we are called to the limitation of our liberty. Mark you, there is no room in Christianity for the over-scrupulous and worrying conscience. We are in Christ, and the Son hath made us free, and we are never to lose the gladness of that freedom. All that the Scripture insists upon is this, that we are to use it in the bonds of love, and never to hesitate to limit it if so doing we can help a brother. You say that is hard? I grant you it is hard. The gospel quite admits that it is hard. It may be irritating when we want to *live*, to have to consider the weak brother so. And then, flashing upon us in its glory, there comes the thought that Christ has died for him—and after

that we do not find it hard. Once realise the sacrifice of Christ, and all our little denials are as nothing. He gave his life up for that weaker brother, and shall not we give up our liberty? It is thus that we come to have fellowship with him, and to know him better as we take our journey, for fellowship grows not alone by what we *get*: it grows also by what we *yield*.

In the third place, and very briefly, our liberty is to be limited in the interests of the gospel.

In the ninth chapter of this epistle we have a great instance of that motive. Paul has been arguing, with overwhelming power, for the right of the preachers of the Word to receive payment. He appeals to Scripture—he argues by analogy—he urges the great plea of common sense. He gives a demonstration irrefutable of the right of gospel-preachers to be paid. And then, with one of those swift turns of his which help us to know him and to love him, he says, but I—I have not used this right, lest I should hinder the gospel of Christ. There is an instance also in the life of Jesus which will help you to understand my meaning. It is when he was asked to pay the temple tax. It is only Matthew who narrates

that incident, and it is natural that he should tell it, for Matthew had been a tax-gatherer himself once, and would be interested in taxes to the end. Well, when Jesus heard of the demand, you remember what he said to Peter? What thinkest thou, Simon, of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute—of their own children or strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers; and Jesus answered, Then are the children free. What he meant was that *he* was free, for the temple was his Father's house. He could have claimed exemption as a right. It was part of the liberty of sonship. But then had he insisted on his rights, is it not easy to see what would have happened? Jesus saw in an instant what would happen. He had proclaimed the sanctity of law: now men would say he was a lawbreaker. He had urged obedience to Moses' representatives: now he was openly defying them. And so, not with his eye upon his own, but with his eye on the unbelieving world, the tax was paid lest they should be offended. In other words Christ limited his liberty in the supreme interests of the gospel. Deliberately did he forego his rights when to assert them might have been

a stumbling-block. He was come to seek and save the lost, and though the lost might hate him and revile him, he would do nothing howsoever lawful that might make them harder to be won.

My brother, as it was with Jesus, so must it be with you and me. If we are members of the body of Christ, then we have a duty to the world. It is no part of a believer's calling to consult the *opinion* of the world. A man may be likest to his Lord sometimes when his action is laughed at by the worldly wise. All we are taught is that in our use of freedom we must remember those who are without, and how, by what we allow ourselves in Christ, they are like to be affected towards the gospel. If the kind of life that we are living makes it less easy to believe in Christ ; if our behaviour, whether at work or play, is silently hardening anybody's heart, then, though everything we do is justified, and well within the boundaries of our liberties, in the eyes of Jesus there is something wrong. All things are lawful, but all are not expedient, sometimes in the interests of our safety. All things are lawful, but all are not expedient, sometimes in

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the interests of our brother. All things are lawful, but all are not expedient, because around us there is a Christless world, and men with their poor blind eyes are judging Christ by what they see in his professing people.

THE FORBIDDEN SACKCLOTH

None might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.—
Esther iv. 2.

Do you see the meaning of this strange enactment? Do you see what these oriental kings were aiming at? It does not take antiquarianism to interpret it; the interpretation lies in human nature. No one might enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth, and sackcloth was the habiment of sorrow. It was the garb which indicated what was dark in life, and it spoke of weeping eyes and heavy hearts. It was the outward trapping of the misery which lurks in the shadow of the city street, and it was because of that it was forbidden. What these Eastern despots were trying to do was this—they were trying to keep reality at bay. They were trying to shut their eyes to what was dark, though the city beyond the gate was full of darkness. They were trying

to ignore the sorrow that lifted up its weeping in the streets, and lay in anguish and in loneliness upon the pallets of a thousand homes. It was a very unkingly thing to do, for a king should enter into his people's woes. It was a very foolish thing to do, for it was attempting the impossible. And yet I believe it is the kind of thing that multitudes of people are attempting, and it is to such people that I now speak. I speak to those who will not face the facts, when the facts are clad in garments of distress. I speak to those who fortify themselves against the intrusion of the uncomfortable. And the strange thing is that many who do that, so far from being monsters of inhumanity, are among the pleasantest and kindest-hearted people whom one meets with in this world.

First, then, let us look for a moment at those who act so in regard to themselves.

Now one might have thought that the passion for self-knowledge would have burned intensely in the human breast. It may be important to know the truth about the history of Greece and Rome. It may be important to know the truth about the rise and setting of the planets. But

to know the truth about oneself, when life and death and judgement are involved, is something incalculably more determinative. When a business man becomes suspicious that things are being mismanaged in his business, does he not set himself to find the truth, no matter who has to suffer by the finding? When a mother suspects that her daughter is not well, when she sees the hectic flush, or hears the cough, does not she face the truth although her heart is breaking, and face it because she loves her child? And the strange thing is that though men love themselves, with a love that is ineradicable and intense, that is the course they very rarely take when they become suspicious of their state. Not one in a thousand has the moral courage to look his true condition in the face. Not one in a thousand has ever cried despairingly, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' Men turn their eyes away from the sad facts, and veil them with most plausible excuses, and bar the gateway of the palace court on the dark and gloomy spectacle of sackcloth.

Nor, when you come to think of it, is it difficult to see the reason of that conduct. It is the shrewd suspicion that the sackcloth will

interfere with music and with song. That was why oriental despots kept it out. They wanted to be happy and at peace. They did not want to be disturbed and burdened by glimpses of profound and awful things. And that is why men are false to their own hearts, evading the plain issues of their conduct. They are afraid of what they might discover if they went down into the depths of their own souls. A man may study astronomy or botany, and still continue living as before. A man may give his days and nights to Shakespeare, and still be a thoroughly complacent person. But when one has really studied his own heart, and seen a little of what it truly is, then self-complacency has gone for ever. Seeing the highest of his moral nature, he sees the depths within him of disgrace. If from his soul he finds a gate to heaven, he wakens to find there is a gate to hell. And all this is so alarming and distressing, so full of humiliation and despair, that the shallow satisfaction of self-ignorance takes to itself wings and flies away. That is why multitudes in every age are struggling to keep reality at bay. There are many who have the courage to face the

music, who have not got the courage to face facts. For they know the kind of thing that they would see, and they know the kind of change that would be called for, and they know that from that hour of vision life would have to be different for ever.

I think, too, that that is a deep reason why many are chary of accepting Christ. It is not that they cannot stand his claims; it is rather that they cannot stand his vision. You remember the Gadarene demoniac, and how he felt when the eyes of Christ were on him? 'What have I to do with thee, thou Christ, art thou come to torment me before my time?' You remember Peter on the lake of Galilee, when the nets were filled until they brake? 'Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man.' There are people whom we sometimes meet who make us feel ashamed of what we are. It is not any thing they say that does it. It is not their words; it is their personality. The very look within their eyes rebukes us, and makes us think of all we might have been, and touches us, for all our outward show, into a true abhorrence of ourselves. That is one of the ministries of

children. It is also one of the ministries of Christ. Christ is here to save unto the uttermost, but he begins his saving by his searching. And that is why multitudes keep Christ at bay—because they cannot tolerate that searching. It is not his *heart* they have a quarrel with. They have only a quarrel with his *eyes*.

So far then in relation to ourselves, and now I pass on to the other point. Let us look now at those who act so, in regard not to themselves but to the world.

Now I am far from saying that a man is justified when he has eyes for nothing but the sackcloth. There are people we sometimes meet who make us miserable, because they have nothing to talk about but that. It may be that they are naturally pessimists, for, like poets, pessimists are born so. Or it may be their service takes them where misery is awful in its wretchedness. And the horror of it is so burned upon them, by the sights they see and by the sounds they hear, that they can talk or think of little else. I take it there is something wrong in that. If the world is God's, there is more in it than sackcloth. There is something of sunshine in the darkest

place ; something of hope where blasphemy holds riot. But I would to God that a thousand men and women were wakened to that sense of the world's sorrow, rather than live, as they are living daily, with a gateway that is barred against the dark. What sorrow and what sin there is within a stone's-throw of our home ! What need of help for little helpless children, for men and women in the devil's clutches ! And yet how many are living on contented, and shutting their eyes to what is stern and terrible, and keeping the dark reality at bay as certainly as did this Eastern king. No sackcloth must come within their gates. They must have a good time at any cost. They must live their easy and comfortable lives, as if there were no voices calling them. It is *that* which kindles the anger of the socialist. It is *that* which makes the Church of Christ a byword. It is *that* which leads, as it has always led, to the sheer precipice of revolution. It is not the king's palace that men hate. It is the palace where the gate is barred. It is the life that professes to be a life in Christ, and is dead to the bitter crying of humanity. And the pity is, as all of us have seen, that those who try to

shut the sackcloth out, are often, within the palace walls, among the kindest people in the world.

Now will I tell you why this wilful blindness is so branded and condemned in Scripture? It is because it is the attitude of antichrist. The one thing that Christ refused to do was to shut his eyes to what was dark. With a courage which was begotten of his love, he looked full-face at all reality. He saw the best; he also saw the worst. He saw the brightest and the darkest too. He opened his palace-gate to all the song, and he opened his palace-gate to all the sackcloth. Think of him when Bartimaeus cried to him—how swift and generous he was to answer! Think of him coming down from the Transfiguration—how swiftly he healed the paralytic boy! Whatever you may think of Jesus Christ, this at least you will bear witness to, that never once, in a world so full of suffering, did he seek to keep reality at bay. It cost him a great deal to be so true. It cost him in the end his life. Had he passed by upon the other side, he would have passed his agony and cross. And it is just because that is his

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spirit, and that the fashion of his life and love, that there can never be any fellowship with him for the man who bars his gate upon the sackcloth. Do any feel that that is so with them? Have they been trying to keep things at bay? It is a great and tragical mistake, even in the interests of happiness. God will not let you be happy as you want. He will bring the sackcloth in, in spite of you. Surely it were wiser now, in love, willingly to fling wide the palace-gate.

VISION AND ORNAMENT

And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments from Mount Horeb onwards.—Exod. xxxiii. 6 (R.V.).

THE ornaments referred to in our text were of course those which had been given by the Egyptians. It had been promised the Israelites that they should not go out empty, and the promise had been very royally kept. Eager to get Israel away at any cost, the Egyptians had given all that they were asked for. They had lavished their jewels of silver and their jewels of gold on those who had been but yesterday their slaves. And so it came to pass that in the exodus the children of Israel were no longer poor, but were possessed of a strange wealth of ornament. Now you can understand the peril of that finery. It was a doubtful and a dangerous enrichment. Had they been accustomed all their lives to such adornments they might have been less prone to

overvalue them. But all unexpectedly and suddenly to find themselves possessors of these things, was no slight temptation to be worldly. They would wear them on every possible occasion. Many a woman would dream of little else. And they would take them out of their casquets in the evening, and polish them, and try them on again. Until at last their growing pleasure in them, and all the selfishness that was begotten so, would fall like a curtain betwixt them and God.

And then, in the leadership of heaven, they were brought to Mount Sinai which is Horeb. I need not tell you all that happened there ; it is graven imperishably on the memory. There they were brought into living touch with God. There they were awed and smitten by his glory. There they learned in ways we shall never fathom how great he was—how wonderful—how holy. And in that vision of the King of kings they began to see what they had been, and how shallow and how poor had been their pleasures. Yesterday they had delighted in their ornaments ; now their ornaments seemed childish baubles. Something had happened to stir the deeps within them, and they never could be so satisfied again. All

that had charmed them had now lost its charm, not because the things that charmed were altered. All that had charmed them had now lost its charm, because their eyes were opened to the Highest. Still would the gold gleam—still would the silver flash—as they had gleamed and flashed at Marah and at Elim. Still would the sapphire show its depth of blue and the red garnet glow like living fire. But for them the glory was all dimmed now of sapphire and of garnet and of gold, for they had seen the glory of the Lord. It was then they stripped themselves of their ornaments. They did it from Mount Horeb onwards. They did it from the hour when they were wakened to the unspeakable glory of Jehovah. And so they become to us a parable of what is witnessed in a thousand ways, when vision comes, and life is deepened, and the soul knows the reality of God.

In passing, I ask you to observe that this stripping off was a voluntary action. Our text does not hint at anything enforced, nor am I speaking on such a theme to-night. We might have read, for instance, that some enemy had fallen upon Israel and stripped it. And the day was coming when Israel would experience that, at the hands of

Babylon and at the hands of Rome. But *here* the spoliation was not such ; it was not the resistless grasping of a conqueror ; it was a deliberate and voluntary action on the part of the Israelites themselves. There are certain strippings off in human life that you and I have no power to arrest. The flight of time, for example, does such work, for time is a conqueror no less than death. There are many ornaments of mind and body that the years strip off from us resistlessly, as the leaves are stripped by the November gale. Then, too, there is all the tragedy of accident, when life is robbed of its glory in a moment, when the eye is blinded, or when the arm is crushed, or when the reason is unseated from its throne. What I say is that in this strange life of ours there are certain strippings off we cannot hinder, and a wise man will lay his reckoning with these. Now mark you that in our text to-night it is not facts like these that we are faced with. The children of Israel stripped *themselves*, we read ; it was a voluntary act that followed vision. And so I say it becomes to me a parable of what I seem to see in many spheres, when once the eyes have been opened on the journey.

Think in the first place of literature. To me, and I am sure to many of my hearers also, the history of literature is a fascinating study. To trace the development of a great writer is one of the delights of the quiet hour. Now of course whenever you find genius, you have something that is a law unto itself. You can never map out a road for genius, and say along *that* it is sure to travel. Yet broadly speaking this I think is true, that there comes to the poet, as there came to Israel, a season when he strips off his ornaments before some vision of the eternal hills. How ornate, how tricked out with finery, is the earlier work of many of our poets! How it sparkles in the light of fancy! How exquisitely beautiful it is! And then the years pass, and suffering comes, and sorrow with pale hand beats on the door, and there comes a change over the poet's dream. It came to Milton when blindness fell upon him, and everything was irrecoverably dark to him. It came to Cowper, frivolous and foolish, when he was gripped in the tragedy of madness. It came to Keats when in the drop of lung-blood he recognised the sealing of his death-warrant. It came to Tennyson through quiet brooding on the

death of one of his choice friends. All these were led in the ordering of God where the gaunt hills lift up their jagged peaks. And there they saw—saw as in a vision—the glory that is encircled with the cloud. And what I say is that from that time onward you will detect, if you have eyes to see it, a certain stripping of the ornament that had been the pride of earlier days. Not less beautiful are their poems now—beauty unadorned is then adorned the most. Not less truly rich are they than in the old days of license and luxuriance. It is only that the ornament is gone—stripped off by that sight of God among the mountains, which sooner or later comes to every man, whether he be a genius or a fool.

The same thing also strikes me in regard to preaching. In my enforced leisure of these last few months I have been privileged to hear a great many sermons. I have listened to more preaching lately than I have had liberty to do for twenty years. Now let me say at once that what impressed me was the high level of that preaching. Sunday after Sunday—here and there—I have listened to sermons of most genuine excellence. I question if ever in the Scottish Church—and

this is a matter about which I know a little—I question if ever the general average of preaching was higher than it is to-day. Well, sometimes I listened to young ministers and sometimes I listened to old ministers ; and here again, as in the field of literature, it would be easy to make our statements far too sweeping. But certainly I seemed to notice this, that for most ministers there comes a season when they are impassioned to strip off the ornaments which they brought with them when they came from Egypt. How we delight in style in our first sermons ! How we pride ourselves upon their purple patches ! We may not be determined to save souls, but we are all determined to be eloquent. And then God leads us to the mount of vision where the peaks climb into the azure—and we never want to be eloquent again. We have seen what life is, and we have seen what death is. We have learned what common men have got to suffer. We have found what the poet calls the tears of things, and they are glistening on every human lot. My brother, it is then that the true preacher strips himself, like Israel, of ornament, and with a directness that is unmistakable speaks as a dying

man to dying men. He will still use every gift he has—imagination is as divine as reason—but they must come to him now like birds upon the wing ; he will not seek them out nor centre on them. He wants to save men now. He wants to help them. He wants to be of use while the lamp burns. He preached for the salvation of his sermon once ; now for the salvation of his brother.

The same thing, too, I think, may be observed in the history of the Church of Christ. I do not know if any of you happen to have read a great biography which was published recently. I refer to the biography of Cardinal Newman. Let me say in passing that should any one here ever be tempted to join the Romish Church, I know nothing more likely to dissuade him from it than the reading of that so tragic story. Now one thing that shines out in that biography is Newman's devotion to the mediæval church. As we read, that church comes very near to us, clad in the garments of the Middle Ages. And one of the first things we notice in that church, which sat in state in mediæval Christendom, is its lavish and magnificent adornment. How gorgeous were

the vestments of its priests ! How splendid was the ritual of its worship ! What wealth there was of artistic decoration in a thousand churches and cathedrals ! Like the children of Israel—that church of the old covenant—it was decked with jewels of silver and of gold, and they were very beautiful and costly. And then there came to that church its day of vision. You know what we call it ? We call it the Reformation. You will never understand the Reformation until you regard it in that spiritual way. Politics were mixed up with it—granted. And there was self-seeking and covetousness—granted. But at the heart of it the Reformation was not that ; *it was a new vision of God.* There fell on men through the power of the Holy Ghost a new and burning sense of the divine. And God drew near, and to a million hearts became the one overpowering reality. And then what happened ? You all know what happened. It is the one thing some of you know about that period. You know how the church, impassioned by her vision, stripped off the ornaments that were her pride. Gone were the jewels of silver and of gold. Gone were the decked garments of the priests. Gone

was the altar and the crucifix, and the savour of incense, and the sound of bells. And in its place there came a simpler worship—a worship that was as sublime as it was simple, for it spoke of access to the heart of God. Will you remember that, my brother, when you are tempted to gird at the Reformers? They were not acting childishly, nor wreaking vengeance in a petty way. They were men under the grip of this great law that when new vision is granted of the highest, somehow, perhaps we know not how, we feel that the ornament must go.

And then to bring the matter nearer home, is this not also true of common life? ‘When I became a man,’ says the apostle, ‘I put away childish things.’ There is an exquisite scene in George Eliot’s *Adam Bede* which many of you will remember. It is where Hetty Sorrel in her bed-chamber at night decks herself out in her cheap finery. She has stolen upstairs, and she has locked the door, and she has lit the bits of candle at the looking-glass. And then she lets her glorious hair fall down, and throws her scarf on, and puts in her gaudy earrings. And so she sits gazing at herself, thoroughly happy and self-

satisfied, dreaming her foolish childish little dreams. Poor Hetty, what a day was coming for her when all the deeps were to be opened up ! What a day was coming when she would be face to face with the awful realities of life and death ! And I need not tell you—George Eliot will tell you—how when *that* day with its vision came, Hetty stripped herself of all her ornaments. My brother and sister, God has many ways of bringing vision into our common life. Love will do it, or some new ambition, or sorrow, or the shadowing of pain. But when it comes—when we arrive at Horeb, and see on its peaks the glory and the cloud, we recognise our fellowship with Israel. Much that we set our hearts on yesterday seems to us utterly trivial to-day. Things that were all-important to us once seem curiously unimportant now. We realise how shallow and impertinent was the kind of life that we were busied with, before our eyes were opened, and we saw. That is the value of our hour of vision. It weans us from the love of what is shallow. It makes it impossible to be contented now with a life of surface or of show. Things are always different after Horeb, and

watching eyes are swift to see the difference, as the eyes of the watchful Arab might have seen it in the companies of marching Israel.

And very especially does that hold true of the vision of God in Jesus Christ. In the hour when a man's eyes rest full on *him* there is the stripping off of many an ornament. I suppose that most of us have met with people who made us secretly ashamed of what we were. We never confessed it perhaps to anybody, yet that was the effect they had upon us. And I often feel that when Jesus was on earth there was something of that influence about him. Men flung away from them their self-complacency, in the hour when they were face to face with Christ. My brother, it is always so. A great deal has to go when you see him. In that great hour you will strip off from you much that was delightsome to you once. But always there is given you in exchange a heart so deepened and a world so wonderful, that life becomes, spite of all pain and failure, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever.

SUMMER AND WINTER

Thou hast made summer and winter.—Psalm lxxiv. 17.

I SUPPOSE there are few who seriously doubt that the maker of the summer-time is God. There is something in every summer's glory that tells us of the touch of the divine. When the green grass is on the earth again ; when the breeze is playing in the leaves ; when in the meadows and the shady wood, punctual to their tryst, the flowers have come ; then men have felt with one of these deep feelings which are not less true than they defy analysis, that here is indeed the handiwork of God. This feeling links itself with three great features which are characteristic of the summer. The first is light ; the second beauty ; the third is prodigality of life. All these are attributes of the Unseen One—the King in his beauty who is light and life—and these are attributes of summer also. It is in summer that men lift up their eyes,

and looking on the world say God is good. It is in summer that earth's thousand voices seem to be blending in a song of praise. There may be things which it is hard to credit amid the mysteries that ring us round ; but it is never hard to credit this, that God is the maker of the summer-time.

Now what I want you to notice in our text first is that it says a great deal more than that. It says not only 'Thou hast made the summer.' It says 'Thou hast made the summer and the winter.' It was an old belief, still held by multitudes, that rival deities had been at work on nature. It was not the handiwork of one god ; it was the handiwork of two gods. And all the sharp antagonisms of the universe, and all the contrasts amid which we live, were but the tokens of their mutual enmity. Had the one made the glory of the day ? The other had made the darkness of the night. Had the one cheered us with the genial heat ? The other had cursed us with the bitter cold. It was one power that made the radiant morn ; it was another that made the deepening shadow. There were millions of people who believed that once, and there

are millions who believe it still. How different, how superbly different, is the spiritual vision of this singer ! It was the God of Abraham who made the summer. It was his God who made the winter too. The very hand that decked the summer meadow, and cast the mantle of green upon the forest, touched that summer glory and it died. Thou hast made the summer *and* the winter. Thou hast clothed and thou hast stripped again. Thou hast lengthened out the shining hours, and thou hast crushed them into a little space. Thou hast created the gentle breath of evening that falls with benediction on the cheek, and thou the bitter and the piercing blast.

Now I want you to carry that great truth into regions which the eye hath never seen. I want you to believe that the one God hath made the summer and winter of the heart. There are experiences which come to every man which are tingling with the touch of heaven. They are so radiant and so delightful that we never doubt the hand which gave us them. It is good to be grateful for such recurring gladness, but more is needed for a life of victory. He who would conquer must have

faith to say, ‘Thou hast made the summer *and* the winter.’ God is not only gracious when the sun shines. He is as gracious when the wind is keen. He gives the glory and he strips the glory, and on his vesture is the name of love. He who can trace his hand when it is winter—who can still say he loves me and he knows—has won the secret of that abiding peace which the world cannot give and cannot take away. What a summer-time the patriarch Job enjoyed! How the sun shone on him for many a day! There was no one like him in the land of Uz, for health and wealth and happiness and peace. And then there fell on him the blast of winter, and he was desolate and deathly cold, and ‘The Lord hath given and taken away,’ said Job, ‘blessed be the name of the Lord.’ Do you remember what his wife advised him? His wife advised him to curse God and die. Do you remember what his friends advised him? It was to confess that he had played the hypocrite. But Job was far too big a man for that. ‘Though he slay me yet will I trust in him.’ The faith in which he conquered was just this, ‘Thou hast made the summer *and* the winter.’

And now another question meets me: How is it that God makes the summer? What is the unseen loom on which he weaves that garment of beauty which we see him by? Charge me not with being mystical when I reply that *winter* is the loom. It is a truth which science will corroborate that out of the winter he hath made the summer. When a child rises in the morning, what an exuberance of life is there! She will go singing through the morning hour as though her little nursery were a paradise. And her eyes are bright as if the sun had touched them, and she will move her feet as if to music; and all that life, so wonderful and glad, has been created in the womb of sleep. We say that in winter everything is dead. That is what they said of Jairus' daughter. And then came Christ, and looked at her, and said, 'The maiden is not dead, but sleepeth.' So have we learned that in the dead of winter—and we never talk about the dead of summer—what we call death is but the children's sleep. Life has not vanished though the eyes be closed. It is not death though tresses be dishevelled. The garment of beauty has been laid aside, but the heart still beats within the frame.

And then comes morning—comes the *summer* morning—comes the fair sweet morn that we have sighed for—and it is ours, in all its gladsomeness, because of the quiet sleep of winter-time. Perpetual summer would be loss unutterable. Perpetual summer would be perpetual mockery. There is no greenness of the grass in June unless there be the chillness of November. God needs the one if he would make the other; fashions the glory out of the decay; lays the field under the grip of ice that it may be golden with the waving grain.

Once again, then, will you take that truth, and carry it up into a higher sphere? It is as true of us as of the earth that winter holds the secret of the summer. Out of December God will fashion June. Out of the cross he fashioneth the crown. Out of the trial that was so hard to bear he brings the beauty of the saintly character. ‘God be merciful to me a sinner’—that is the winter of our discontent, and yet when a man, despairing, has cried *that*, he is making for his summer and his song. There came to Glasgow, not so long ago, a pianist of an excellent reputation. I read the *Herald’s* criticism on him, and

there was one thing in it that I noted specially. The *Herald* said that he had been always brilliant—always been wonderful as an executant—but now there was a depth of feeling in him that had never been present in his work before. A day or two afterwards, preaching in a suburb, I met a relative of the pianist. And we fell to talk of him, and of the *Herald*, and of the *Herald's* criticism on him. And he said to me, ‘Did you notice that? And do you know what was the secret of the change? *It was the death of his mother eighteen months ago.*’ He was an only son, unmarried, and he had been simply devoted to his mother. And then she died, and he was left alone, and all the deeps were broken up in him. And now he played as only he can play who knows what life and death are, and what sorrow is—and out of the winter God had made his summer. Perpetual sunshine makes people selfish. It makes them brilliant, perhaps, but never deep. They do not understand. They never know. They condescend; they cannot sympathise. All that is beautiful in men and nations springs from the season when the tree is stripped. All that is fairest in the world rises

from the darkness of the Cross. I suppose there are many of you here to-night who are, like me, lovers of the Tweed. It is so beautiful, that river Tweed, and is so haunted by a hundred memories. And yet that river, in whose gentle murmuring we catch the echo of unforgotten voices, rises where everything is bleak and bare. There is no beauty that we should desire it there. There is only the desolate and lonely moor. There is no song, no shadowing of tree, no gathering of the great dead beside its waters. Out of that winter God has made its summer, and to that summer come a thousand pilgrims, who know not, for they have never seen, the bleak and barren region of its rise. God hath made the summer and the winter. Do not forget he made the winter first. Millions of years before the date of Eden, the world was slumbering beneath the ice. My brother, that is how he leads us, for of our hearts the world is but the shadow. He will never leave us nor forsake us.

Thirdly and lastly I ask another question : Why hath he made the summer and the winter ? There is only one answer that can be given to that, in the light of all that we have learned to-

day. Not for their own sakes hath he made them—not for their sublimity or beauty merely. Through night and day, through sunshine and through storm, God has his purpose which is never baffled. And that one purpose—how shall we describe it? Put in simple language it is this. It is the purpose for every living thing that after summer there should be the harvest. Mark you, God has many purposes in every providence and every season. Undoubtedly when he made the summer beautiful he meant it to give pleasure to his children. But there is one end deeper than all others, and reaching from the highest to the lowest, and that is the end which has its sign and sacrament in the mellowing of the harvest field. It is for *this* there changes in the spring ‘a livelier iris on the burnished dove.’ It is for this the bird has got its song. It is for this the lily has been painted. Nothing is beautiful in nature for its own sake. Beauty is a trust for other’s sakes. Summer and winter look beyond themselves to the time when the flower shall wither and the fruit shall come. Have you considered the lilies in that light? It is the great lesson we have learned to-day. Not even Solomon in all his glory was

arrayed like one of these. And yet that garment, woven of the light, is but an instrument in the Almighty's hand that when the summer shall have come again there may still be lilies in the fields of Nazareth. He that liveth to himself is dead. There is he that scattereth and yet increaseth. Our gifts—our summer sun and winter storm—these have an end to serve in other lives. We are not here simply to be happy. We are here to serve and be a blessing. And 'Thou hast made our summer and our winter' that we may have the joy of harvest-home.

CHRIST AND THE FEAR OF DEATH

And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.—Heb. ii. 15.

THERE are two feelings which the thought of death has ever kindled in the human breast, and the first of them is curiosity. Always in the presence of that veil, through which sooner or later we all pass, men have been moved to ask, with bated breath, What is it which that veil conceals? It is as if the most diaphanous of curtains were hung between our eye and the great secret, making men the more wistful to interpret it. It has been said by a well-known Scottish essayist that this would account for the crowd at executions. You know how the people used to flock in thousands when a criminal was to die upon the gallows. And Alexander Smith throws out this thought that it was not just savagery which brought them there. It was the unappeasable

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curiosity which death for ever stirs in human hearts.

But if the thought of death moves our curiosity, there is another feeling which is ever linked with it. Death is not alone the source of wonder. Death has ever been the source of fear. How universal that feeling is we see from this, that we share it with all animate creation. Wherever there is life in any form there is an instinct which recoils from death. When the butterfly evades the chasing schoolboy—when the stag turns at bay against the dogs—we have the rudiments of that which in a loftier sphere may grow to be a bondage and a tyranny. The fear of death is not a religious thing, although religion has infinitely deepened it. It is old as existence ; wide as the whole world ; lofty and deep as the whole social fabric. It touches the savage in the heart of Africa, as every reader of Dr. Livingstone knows, and it hides under the mantle of the prince as well as under the jacket of the prodigal. How keenly it was felt in the old world, every reader of pagan literature has seen. The aim and object of the old philosophy was largely to crush it out of human life. In the great and gloomy poem of

Lucretius, in many a page of Cicero, above all in the treatises of Plutarch and of Seneca, we learn what a mighty thing the fear of death was with the men and women of the Roman Empire.

Of course I do not mean that the fear of death is always active and present and insistent. To say that would be exaggeration, and would be untrue to the plain facts of life. When a man is in the enjoyment of good health, he very rarely thinks of death at all. When the world goes well with him and he is happy, he has the trick of forgetting he is mortal. He digs his graves within the garden walls, and covers them with a wealth of summer flowers, so that the eye scarce notices the mound when the birds are singing in the trees. We know, too, how a passion or enthusiasm will master the fear of death within the heart. A soldier in the last rush will never think of it, though comrades are dropping on every side of him. And a timid mother, for her little child's sake, or a woman for the sake of one she loves, will face the deadliest peril without trembling. For multitudes the fear of death is dormant, else life would be unbearable and wretched. But though it is dormant it is always there, ready to

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be revived in the last day. In times of shipwreck—in hours of sudden panic—when we are ill and told we may not live, then shudderingly, as from uncharted deeps, there steals on men this universal terror. Remember there is nothing cowardly in that. A man may be afraid and be a hero. There are times when to feel no terror is not courage. It is but the hall-mark of insensibility. It is not what a man feels that makes the difference. It is how he handles and orders what he feels. It is the spirit in which he holds himself, in the hour when the heart is overwhelmed.

Nor can we be altogether blind to the purposes which God meant this fear to serve. Like everything universal in the heart, it has its office in the plans of heaven. You remember the cry wrung from the heart of Keats in his so exquisite music to the nightingale. ‘Full many a time,’ he sings, ‘I have been half in love with easeful death.’ And it may be that there are some here to-night who have been at times so weary of it all, that they too have been in love with easeful death. It may have been utter tiredness that caused it. It may have been something deeper than all

weariness. Who knows but that even here before me there be not some one who has dreamt of suicide? Brethren, it is from all such thoughts, and from all the passion to have done with life, that we are rescued and redeemed and guarded by the terror which God has hung around the grave. Work may be hard, but death is harder still. Duty may be stern, but death is sterner. Dark and gloomy may be the unknown morrow, but it is not so dark and gloomy as the grave. Who might not break the hedge and make for liberty were the hedge easy to be pushed aside? But God has hedged us about with many a thorn—and we turn to our little pasturage again. When Adam and Eve had been expelled from Eden, they must have longed intensely to return. It was so beautiful, and the world so desolate; it was so fertile, and the world so hard. But ever, when they clasped repentant hands, and stole in the twilight to the gate of Paradise, there rose the awful form with flaming sword. Sleepless and vigilant he stood at watch. His was a dreadful and terrific presence. No human heart could face that living fire which stood in guardianship of what was lost. And that was

why God had placed his angel there, that they might be driven back to the harsh furrow, and till the soil, and rise into nobility, while the sweat was dropping from the brow. So are we driven back to life again by the terror which stands sentinel on death. So are we driven to our daily cross, however unsupportable it seems. And bearing it, at first because we must, it comes to blossom with the passing days, till we discover that on this side the grave there is more of paradise than we had dreamed. Christ then does *not* deliver us from the deep instinct of self-preservation. That is implanted in the heart by God. It is given for the safeguarding of his gift. It is only when that fear becomes a bondage, and when that instinct grows into a tyranny, that Christ steps in, and breaks the chains that bind us, and sets our trembling feet in a large room. The question is, then, how did he do that? How has Christ liberated us from this bondage? I shall answer that by trying to distinguish three elements which are inherent in that fear.

In the first place, our fear of death is in a measure but a fear of dying. It is not the fact of

death which terrifies ; it is all that we associate with the fact. We may have seen some death-bed which was a scene of agony ; it is a memory which we shall never lose. We may have read, in novel or in drama, a story of torment in the closing hours. And it is not what death leads to or removes, but rather that dark accompanying prospect, which lies hidden within a thousand hearts as an element of the terror of the grave. I think I need hardly stop to prove to you that this is an unreasonable fear. If there are death-beds which are terrible, are there not others which are quiet as sleep ? But blessed be God, Christ does not only comfort us when we are terrified with *just* alarms : he comforts us when we are foolish children. Girt with mortality, he says to us, ‘Take no anxious thought about the morrow.’ Dreading the pain that one day may arrive, he says, ‘Sufficient unto the day is its own evil.’ He never prayed, ‘Give us a sight of death, and help us to contemplate it every hour we live.’ He prayed, ‘Give us this day our daily bread.’ Christ will not have us stop the song to-day, because of the possible suffering to-morrow. If we have grace to live by when we need it, we shall have grace to

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die by when we need it. And so he sets his face against that element, and says to us, 'Let not your heart be troubled.' 'My grace shall be sufficient for thee, and my strength made perfect in thy weakness.'

Secondly, much of our fear of death springs from the thought that death is the end of everything. It is always pitiful to say farewell, and there is no farewell like that of death. You remember how Charles Lamb uttered that feeling, with the wistful tenderness which makes us love him. He did not want to leave this kindly world, nor his dear haunts, nor the familiar faces. And deep within us, though we may not acknowledge it, there is that factor in the fear of death—the passionate clinging of the human heart to the only life which it has known. We have grown familiar with it in the years. It has come to look on us with friendly eyes. It has been a glad thing to have our work to do, and human love and friendship have been sweet. And then comes death, and takes all that away from us, and says it never shall be ours again, and we brood on it, and are lonely and afraid. Thanks be to God, *that factor in the fear has been destroyed by Jesus*

Christ. For he has died, and he is risen again, and he is the first-fruits of them that sleep. And if the grave for him was not an end, but only an incident in life eternal, then we may rest assured that in his love there is no such sadness as the broken melody. All we have striven to be we shall attain. All we have striven to do we shall achieve. All we have loved shall meet us once again with eyes that are transfigured in the dawn. Every purpose that was baffled here, and every love that never was fulfilled, all that, and all our labour glorified, shall still be ours when shadows flee away. This life is but the prelude to the piece. This life is the introduction to the book. It is not *finis* we should write at death. It is not *finis*, it is *initium*. And that is how Jesus Christ has met this element, and mastered it in his victorious way, and made it possible for breaking hearts to bear the voiceless sorrow of farewell.

Thirdly, much of the fear of death springs from the certainty of coming judgement. Say what you will, you know as well as I do that there is a day of judgement still to come. Conscience tells it, if conscience be not dead. The very thought of

a just God demands it. Unless there be a judgement still to come, life is the most tragical of mockeries. And every voice of antiquity proclaims it, and every savage tribe within the forest ; and with a certainty that never wavered it was proclaimed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Well may you and I fear death, if ‘after death, the judgement.’ Seen to our depths, with every secret known, we are all to stand before Almighty God. Kings will be there, and peasants will be there, and you and I who are not kings nor peasants. And the rich and the poor will meet together there, for the Lord is the maker of them all. It is that thought which makes death so terrible. It is that which deepens the horror of the tomb. Dwell on that coming day beyond the grave, and what a prospect of affright it is ! And it is then that Jesus Christ appears, and drives these terrors to the winds of heaven, and says to the vilest sinner here to-night, ‘Son of man, stand upon thy feet.’ He that believeth *hath* everlasting life. He gives us our acquittal here and now. He tells us that for every man who trusts him there is now therefore no condemnation. And he tells us that because he died for us, and because he bore our sins up

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to the tree, and because he loves us with a love so mighty that neither life nor death can tear us from it. That is the faith to live by and to die by : 'I will both lay me down in peace and sleep.' That is the faith which makes us more than conquerors over the ugliest record of our past. O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

FAITH REFUSING DELIVERANCE

He sent me to preach deliverance to the captives.—Luke iv. 18.
Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance.—Heb. xi. 35.

AMONG the blessings which we connect with faith, one of the most conspicuous is deliverance. The Bible is a great record of deliverance effected through the agency of faith. Abraham was delivered from idolatry. Joseph was delivered from his brethren. David was delivered from Goliath, and Peter from the prison at Jerusalem. And most notable of all, there was the Exodus, when Israel was delivered from its bondage—drawn out of Egypt, by the might of God, into the peril and the prize of liberty. All these are instances of deliverance, wrought in the power of a living faith. Men trusted God, and in the joy of trust were freed from darkness and captivity. And so the Bible, as we read its pages, grows into a great argument for this, that God is able and

willing, if we trust him, to set the feet in a large room.

The same issue of faith also arrests us when we come into the company of Jesus. Here, too, as in the rest of Scripture, faith is a mighty power to deliver. We see the maniac released from legion, and sitting clothed and in his right mind. We see the withered arm restored again; the eye that had been blind regaining sight. We see a woman delivered from infirmity, and a loved brother delivered from the grave, and a great company whose eyes are glad because they have been delivered from their sin. Christ was the great enemy of bonds. He was the lover and the light of liberty. He came to preach deliverance to the captives, and to bestow the gift which was his message. And so again we learn this happy lesson, that faith is a mighty power to redeem; and that in every sphere where faith is active, one of its blessed fruits is liberty.

Yet while that is true, and gloriously true, in a way I trust we all know something of, there is a suggestion in our second text that it is fitting we should not forget. 'They were tortured, not accepting deliverance,' and the whole chapter is

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a song of faith. The chapter is a magnificent review of all that faith is powerful to achieve. So this is also a result of faith, *not* that it brings deliverance to a man, but that sometimes, when deliverance is offered, it gives him a fine courage to refuse it. There are seasons when faith shows itself in taking. There are seasons when it is witnessed in refusing. There is a deliverance that faith embraces. There is a deliverance that faith rejects. They were tortured, not accepting deliverance—that was the sign and seal that they were faithful. There are hours when the strongest proof of faith is the swift rejection of the larger room.

Think in the first place of the martyrs, to whom our text immediately applies. When a man was charged with being a Christian, deliverance was always at his hand. He had only to blaspheme the name of Christ—a word or two of cursing—that was all. He had only to spit upon the name of Christ, when the Roman centurion scratched it on the wall. He had only to put his hand into a box, and take a grain or two of incense from the box, and sprinkle it without a single word before the beautiful statue of Diana. On the one hand

was life, and life was sweet. On the other hand was death, and death was terrible. On the one hand was liberty and home. On the other hand was torture and the grave. And they were tortured, not accepting deliverance. They might have had it by a single word. It was their faith that led them to the scaffold. It was better to be faithful than be free.

The same issue of faith is seen again amid the troubles of our common life. In precisely the same manner it is witnessed in the pettier martyrdoms of every day. Each of us has got his cross to carry. There is no escaping from that law. Each of us has got his secret bitterness, and his burden, and his travail or his fear. For one the trouble may be in business matters; for another, the cross may be at home; while for a third, perhaps, it is the body that wakes the heart to trembling in the night. Now I believe that whatever be the trouble, Jesus Christ has come to preach deliverance. There is peace in him, and quietness of soul, and conquest over death and all its terrors. But remember that there are *other* outlets which sometimes loom upon our gaze invitingly, and promise us the release that we

are craving—if only we are untrue to our best selves. I think that all of us are tempted so, though these are temptations of which we seldom speak. Sometimes indeed we hardly understand them, they are so subtly hidden and disguised. But always there is a tampering with conscience in them, and a certain lowering of the flag of youth, and a sinking down upon a lower level than we know to be worthy in our hearts. It is when a man or woman is so tempted that faith in God is needed to be true. To choose the drudgery and spurn the liberty is the sign-manual of faith in him. ‘They were tortured, not accepting deliverance.’ They let the laughter and the sunshine go. And sometimes in the quiet of our obscurity, you and I may be called to be their children.

Now I might illustrate that by many instances : take, for example, the case of a young man. His work is hard and irksome and ill-paid, and he has a father who is dependent on him. From morning till evening it is a weary grind. There is no encouragement. There are scarce any prospects. And when evening comes he is so fagged that he can hardly follow a good book. And then there

comes to him the glittering chance of work that is easier, and pay that is far better, on the condition that he shuts his eyes, and does not trouble about a tender conscience. Many a man accepts that swift deliverance. He offers the grain of incense to Diana. And then he prospers, and is kind at home, and there are comforts for the aged father. But nothing on earth can alter the old fact that such an act was faithless and untrue, and that a man for ever from that moment has left the company of saints and martyrs. He has been tortured and accepted deliverance, and the world and the devil are exacting creditors. Somehow, as the years unroll themselves, he will discover he has missed the best. And if my words have any weight to-night on young men who are starting out on life, they will write upon their hearts this text of Hebrews, and avoid that tragical mistake.

Or I might take the case of a young woman who is set amid uncongenial surroundings. She is not happy. Perhaps she has to work, and probably her health is very far from good. I shall not paint the picture at its blackest, though I have seen it at its blackest for myself. I shall not touch on that most awful freedom that lurks on

every street of every Babylon. But I shall say that she gets the offer of marriage from some one to whom God has never led her, and to whom in her woman's heart there is no drawing, as of those cords which have been knit in heaven. *There* is the chance of freedom, if you like. *There* is deliverance from all the drudgery. But, O my sister, at what an awful cost of all that is most womanly and delicate ! A thousand times better to be tortured daily than to accept deliverance like that—and it is there, you see, that faith comes in. Faith that God can uphold you in the darkness, and give you music in the weariest mile. Faith that there are better things than happiness, when happiness is bought by being false. Faith that the best in life is *never* lost when you are true to what is high and beautiful ; and *always* lost when you have played the traitor to the sweet sincerities of womanhood.

The same issue of faith is also seen in public and in Christian service. I suppose there is no one engaged in that who does not feel at times a longing for release. It may be that enthusiasm has vanished. It may be that we are disappointed. It may be that those whom we are called to labour

with are irritating and interfering people. So sooner or later comes to us the day when we are tempted to have done with it ; to take our armour off, and hang it up, and pass into the oblivion of peace. Now I am far from saying that that is always wrong. Sometimes it may be right and necessary. A man may be forced to it by doctor's orders, and if he be wise he will attend to these. A man may be led to it by the appeal of conscience telling him he should be more at home, and that no service can have heaven's blessing if wife and children are neglected. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. That is a matter for the heart and God. All that I want to do to-night is this : it is to warn you that all release is not like that. There may be times when deliverance is treachery ; when to seek for freedom is to fail ; when a man's first duty is to continue serving, even though his service may be torture. 'They were tortured, not accepting deliverance,' and sometimes we are called with that vocation. If we trust God we shall refuse relief, and stick to the service we have put our hand to. God has no pleasure in these sorry workers who are always threatening to send in resignations. No man

having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

I am impressed again by the same truth in regard to our spiritual and intellectual difficulties. I may be speaking to some here who have great difficulties about faith and God. They would fain believe, and yet they find it hard. They would fain trust, and yet they cannot trust. They cannot feel their need of a Redeemer. They cannot grasp the power of the cross. Or it may be that, having grasped it once, they have been thrown into darkness by their reading, and cannot reconcile the facts of science with the old message of the love of heaven. My brother, I want to say to you that Christ has got deliverance for you. He has come to preach deliverance to the captive, and there is no captivity so dark as doubt. But there are times of darkness and perplexity when other methods of release will face you, and if you are a man you will reject them, and face the torture which rejection brings. You will *not* take shallow answers to great questions. You will *not* yield up moral questions in despair. You will *not* fall back upon a life of sense, as if in sensuality were rest. But you will be true to all the light

you have, and you will cling to all the good you know, and you will trust that, when the night is past, the singing of the birds is sure to come. To thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man. It is sometimes better to be tossed and tortured, than to be sleeping on a couch of ease. This is one mark of every earnest soul that has come at last to liberty and light. It has been too faithful to the highest to accept deliverance upon unworthy terms.

In closing, may I just remind you how true this was of our Lord Jesus Christ? He is our Saviour not because he seized—he is our Saviour because he refused deliverance. ‘All these kingdoms will I give thee,’ said the Tempter, ‘if thou wilt fall down and worship me.’ Was not that a road to power and princedom which would have escaped the torture of the cross? But he was tortured, not accepting deliverance. He chose the bitter way that led by Calvary. He scorned deliverance by that compliance, and so he has won deliverance for the captive. Then think again, when he approached the cross, how the women offered him the opiate. And had

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he but drunk it, his senses had been numbed, and the agony of crucifixion had been deadened. But having tasted it, he put it from him. He could not and he would not drink it. And he was tortured, not accepting deliverance, that he might be the Saviour of mankind. Now he preaches freedom to the captive. Do you know it? Have you experienced it? Can you to-night bear witness in your heart that you are a freedman of Jesus Christ? If so, to you may come those darksome hours when voices call you to some mean escape, and just because you are a man in Christ, with all the saints and martyrs you will scorn it.

THE VISION AND THE CITY

Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.—Acts ix. 6.

PAUL was journeying to the city of Damascus when this great moment of his life arrived. He could see the walls, far off, white in the glare, when suddenly he was met by Jesus Christ. He had set out with the intense desire of working havoc on these miserable Christians. All pity, all surge of better feeling, he had repressed as a religious task. We shall never know what thoughts had been intruding, what whisperings of conscience had been audible, but we do know how Paul had crushed them down in his magnificent if mistaken sense of duty. Then in the open road Christ met with him, and in a moment everything was changed. He was thrown down, and he was lifted up. He was blinded, and he was made to see. Christ had been watching him

although he never knew it. Christ had been loving him although he never knew it—and now the hour had struck, and the past vanished, and Paul was recreated in his Lord.

Now in that hour, as it seems to me, there would be this feeling in the heart of Paul. There would be a strong and passionate reluctance to continue his journey to Damascus. *There was* the noise of traffic in the streets. There was the stir and movement of a town. There any man whom he met might be a Christian—and he had been bent on slaughtering the Christians. Paul wanted to be alone, in a vast solitude, to brood on the great thing that had befallen him ; he wanted to get away from everything that might recall his murderous intent. Let him be hidden in some desert place. So it were solitary, any place would serve. Let him not have to meet just yet these Christian women whom in the morning he would have gladly crucified. And it was then, in such a mood as that, longing for refuge in some wilderness, that there came to Paul the command of Jesus Christ : ‘ Arise, and go into the city.’ Wert thou making for Damascus, Paul? Then to Damascus thou art

still to go. I have no path for thee to left or right. Thou must abide by the familiar road. Resume thy journey. Take to it again. Continue on the highway of the morning. Only remember that things are different now, for everywhere thou goest I am with thee.

In other words, Jesus was teaching Paul that he must not reckon on a new environment. He had been changed down to the very depths, yet must he travel on the familiar road. So wonderful was the change which Christ had wrought, that Paul may have thought that all the world was altered. Everything was to be different now, since he in the secret of his life was different. And then Christ said to him, Arise; continue on the way that thou wert travelling. Thou art a new man this midday hour, but thou art to live and toil in the old scenes. The heat still shimmers above the sand to-day as it has shimmered for a thousand yesterdays. The clouds still lazily drift across the sky as they were drifting when thou wert a blasphemer. And the willows are drooping by the water-courses, and the smoke is curling from the Damascus roofs, and the children are playing in the shady places just as they were

before I met with thee. Do not imagine that the world is changed because this change has passed upon thy soul. Do not be craving for some new environment because the deeps in thee are broken up. Arise ; continue on the trodden road. Get thee into the city thou wert making for. It is there, and there alone, thou art to show that thou hast had thy vision by the way.

Now I take it that all of us sometimes have a great craving for a change of circumstance. Probably this craving is most common when we, too, have had our hour of vision. There are long periods when we are content. We do not quarrel with our day's monotony. We are satisfied with our nutshell, unlike Hamlet, just because we have no dreams. But then some day to us there comes the vision—the light that never was on sea or land—and there falls on us the longing to escape. It may be when the glow of youth is on us, or when we have felt the beauty of the world ; or love may have touched us with its mystic finger, or death may have opened the windows of the infinite. Ah ! in such hours as that, when we are thrilled as by the stirring of powers that are invisible, who does not know the longing

that arises to shun the road to the Damascus gate ! It is not easy to go quietly forward. It is not easy to touch the common chords. We want to get away to a new sphere, out of the drudgery and dull routine. And it is then that, to our restless hearts, comes *God*, with accent unmistakable, and says *Arise*, and go into the city. He will not give to us a new environment. Vision is not given for new environment. Vision is given that we may take its glory, and carry it into the twilight of the old. Vision is given that everything we do, and every relationship in which we stand, may have some melody that was awanting once, before our eyes were opened by the way. Hast thou seen the glory of the purple heather? Hast thou had any vision of what love is? Hast thou been wakened when the home was darkened to things that were quite hidden in the sun? Arise, my brother, go into the city. Resume thy way and show that thou art different. Vision is not given that we may flee. It is given for the consecration of the commonplace.

The same thing is particularly true of the vision of God in Jesus Christ. It was such a vision that the apostle had. God grant that some

may have it here to-night! Of course I know that Christ may come to you, and call you to some special service. There are those here who have had such a call, and God be thanked they have not disobeyed. But remember that for one case like that, there are a thousand cases not like that. Christ does not call to any distant field : He says, ‘ Arise, and go into the city.’ Does that not seem an anti-climax—to see Christ, and then resume the road ? Would you not look for something far more wonderful as the fit consequence of such a vision ? My brother, if you have studied God, as some of us have tried to study God, you will have found how he loves an anti-climax. He takes the sun, and makes the daisy beautiful. He takes the gift of life, and makes the insect. He takes the mightiest forces of millenniums, and uses them to shape the tiny crystal. And so he takes the vision of the Christ, the love and power of the great Redeemer, and says to you, Employ it for your drudgery, and make the common beautiful thereby. It may be the mark of genius to do unusual things. It is rarely the hall-mark of the Christian. The Christian does not do unusual things, but he does

usual things in an unusual way. He finds a meaning in what before was meaningless ; detects a beauty in what before was ugly ; sees in the commonest tasks that may be set him an avenue to the feet of Jesus Christ. Christ does not summon the workman from his tools. Christ does not call the merchant from his desk. Christ does not send the sister to a nunnery, or suffer the mother to neglect her children. If you have seen him, as the apostle did, in something of his love and of his power, then comes the calling to the road of yesterday. You will be a better workman now, in the company of the one perfect workman. You will be a better merchant now, more zealous and more righteous and more merciful. You will be far more patient as a sister, and far more prayerful as a mother, for Christ hath met you, and that very Christ took the children in his arms and blessed them. Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not. Arise, and go into the city. It is not a paradise by any means. There is no romance in it and it is grimy. But I tell you that either there or nowhere, either there or not in heaven itself, can you make fruitfully and beautifully evi-

dent that you have had your vision by the way.

And now I have another thought for you, drawn from the last words of our text. ‘Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.’ Paul, then, was not told what he should do in that moment when he met with Christ. There is still in Christ, you see, the same reserve as had marked his teaching when on earth. But the point to note is that Paul was to learn God’s will not in the solitude of lonely places, but in the stir and movement of the city. Arise, and go into the city, and *there* thou shalt be told what thou must do—not here where all is hushed as in a sleep, but there where life is battling and tumultuous ; not here where the bent is waving in the breeze, and the only shadow is of drifting cloud, but there where men are, and where women are, where there is love and hate, and life and death.

Now I feel sure of this, that that would be a great surprise to Paul. He had not been wont to associate city life with the whispering of the voice of heaven. He had been born in Tarsus, and educated there, and Tarsus was a typically

Roman city. It was not the voice of God that was heard there, it was the voice of the devil that was audible. Paul knew the sin that flaunted in her streets, and how meanly and beastially the poor were living, and how the shame and badness of it all were crying out to heaven for punishment. We talk about the perils of the city, and God knows they are terrible enough. But remember that *our* city life is lofty compared with that of the cities Paul had known. And yet that day, when Jesus met with him, what was the first command that he received? Arise, and go into the *city*, and there thou shalt be told what thou must do. Moses had learned the will of God for him in the great silence at the back of Horeb. Elijah, amid the mountain solitudes, had heard the calling of the voice of heaven. But now the Christ had come, born in a cottage, moving amid the homes and haunts of men, and everything was to be different now. Instead of the solitude you have the city. Instead of the lone hill the busy street. Not now where the cool wind is blowing is a man to learn his duty and his mission. He is to learn it where lives are inter-tangled, for weal and woe, in business and in battle;

where men and women are, where love and hatred are, where there is social claim and social duty.

Now there are times—I think we have all known them—when some such feeling as this possesses us. We think it would be easier to be better men if only we could steal away. If only we could leave this city life, and get into the gladness of the country, and hear the river with its tireless music, and walk amid the peace of the green hills; if only we could lay our burden down, and be relieved of the pressure for a little, we think we should have quicker ears for God then, and that it would be easier to be good. The merchant, worried by his daily business, thinks what a happy Christian he might be. The mother, wearied out with all her toil, thinks that a change like that would just be heaven. Even the minister, vexed with interruption, tired of publicity and of vulgarity, craves for solitude and silence sometimes that he may hear again the voice of God. Now remember that Jesus is no taskmaster. If you need rest, then he will give you rest. He knows, and knowing sympathises with, the weariness and the pressure of the city. But for all that, this stands and stands for

ever, that Christ is the Christ of men and not of deserts, and that where men are, in all their needs and sorrows, is the appointed place to learn his will. You do not learn God's will by flight. The cloister is a hideous mistake. The will of God is social, not selfish; it is *Our Father* we are taught to pray. It is struck out for us amid the clash of lives. It is revealed in the light of our relationships. It is discovered by every task we do, and by every burden that we bravely bear. It is *not* when our powers are dormant that we learn God's will. It is when our powers are intensely active. It is *not* when we are dead to human need. It is when the cry of it rings upon our ear. It is *not* when the hand is withdrawn from other hands, but when it is clasped in the strong grip of comradeship, that step by step, and day by day, we come to see what God would have us do. Arise, and go into the city, and there thou shalt be told what thou must do—there where the work is, and where the burden is, and where the battle is, and the temptation—not in that cottage you have often dreamed of, where the brook is musical and where the roses blossom; but here in the city where you are to-night.

THE PATTERN OF SERVICE

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day.—
John ix. 4.

LOOKING forward, as many of us are doing, to our Christian service of another winter, it might be helpful were we to dwell a little upon the example of our Lord and Master. He came among us as one who suffereth, and so hath he taught us how to suffer. He also came as one who serveth, and so hath he taught us how to serve. And in this day, when the idea of service exercises such control in western Christendom, it is well that we should turn continually to the perfect service of our Lord. Sometimes out in mid-Atlantic a little barque is caught in a great storm. And she heaves and tosses in the wild of waters till every timber in her frame is racked. And then, not very far away from her, making for the same port across the ocean, majestically there sails

on some mighty liner. Many a worker has so thought of Christ when the winds were contrary and when the sea was violent. With what an ease—with what a sense of power—with what unconscious triumph he goes by ! And so it is well that we should think of him, and find anew the features of his service, and it is on some of these that I want to dwell to-night.

First, then, as I review his work, I find in it a singular union of obedience and originality.

If I were asked what is the keynote to all the manifold service of our Lord, I think I should answer that it was obedience. We speak of the gospel of John as the gospel of love, and certainly it thrills and throbs with love; yet if you go home to-night and read that gospel, at the back of love you will find something else. You will find that in every act he ever wrought, Christ was but doing what the Father showed him ; you will find that in every word he ever spoke, he was but uttering what he had heard. There is a beautiful instrument which some of you may have seen, and to which is given the ugly name of seismograph. It is an instrument for recording the tremors and vibrations of the earth. And so

delicate is it that if in the heart of Africa the earth should tremble with the shock of earthquake, that will be caught and registered in England. It is far from here to Central Africa ; it may be farther still from here to heaven. It was no sceptic, but a prophet of the Highest, who spoke of the land that is very far away. And yet so infinitely sensitive and delicate was the truly human soul of our Redeemer, that every whisper of the voice divine was caught and registered unerringly. Not the tide when it obeys the moon, and moves to its fulness at the appointed moment ; not the swallow when in the destined hour it makes for the sunshine of the south again—not these, nor any angel in the heavens speeding to fulfil the will of God, are so perfectly obedient as was Jesus.

Yet the singular thing is that when men looked on Christ, it was not that obedience which impressed them. It was something which seems quite different from obedience—what impressed them was his originality. On the tomb of Oliver Goldsmith there is written, *Nihil tetigit quod non ornavit*. It means that Goldsmith, with the charm of genius, touched nothing which he did not adorn. And if it be true of him, with all his weaknesses,

a thousand times truer is it of the Master, who poured the infinite riches of his heart into his doctrine and his ministry. He touched the cottage, and from that hour to this life in the cottage has been a different thing. He touched the heart, and in this heart of ours heights and depths appeared which had been hidden. And he touched language and it began to blossom, and he touched womanhood till it grew beautiful, and with his hands of love he touched the cross, and it has been bright with glory ever since. Had you asked Jesus with what eyes he saw, he might have answered 'with the eyes of God.' Had you asked Jesus with what lips he spake, he might have answered 'with the lips of God.' And yet men looked at him, and listened to him, and felt that here was a man who was *himself*. He was as fresh and wonderful and new as the first morning of another spring.

Now as you go out to serve, that is the first thing I want to leave with you. Your first duty is to be obedient to everything that you have learned from God. Never begin by trying to be original. That is always a tragical mistake.

When men or women begin by trying *that*, they generally end by being useless. Begin by the great endeavour to be true to all that God has taught you and has shown you, and gradually in the lowliest service will come the touch that tells you are yourself. All service with that touch in it is blessed. All service without that touch in it is barren. It is a great thing to dare to be oneself whether in society or service. And Christ has shown us the way to that nobility—it is by being unfalteringly true to all that in the depths of our own soul we know to be the very voice of heaven.

In the second place, as I review his work, I find in it a singular union of narrowness and breadth.

Now of course there is a sense of that word narrow which no one would ever apply to Jesus Christ. There is a narrowness which is very noble, and there is another which is very nasty. There is no love in it—no tenderness—no kindly touch as of a brother's hand. It is not generous as the sun is generous when it kisses the orchard of an autumn day. What then do I mean by narrowness? Well, take the story of the third

temptation. ‘All these kingdoms will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.’ There, at the very outset of his life, when the world was all before him where to choose, there was the stirring of imperial dream. ‘All these kingdoms will I give to thee.’ Might not this young prophet be a Cæsar? Might he not go abroad into the world of men, and show that he was the master of them all? And instead of that he chose the narrow road, and moved in quietness through little villages; and Roman historians, when he was dead, could not even spell his name correctly. Deliberately Christ drew his little circle, and inside that little circle he remained. And voices called him, and hands were stretched to him, and men besought him, and he would not listen. Here was the place appointed him of God, and not by a hand’s-breadth would he swerve from it. That was the glory of his narrowness.

And yet once more the singular thing is this, that never was there a life so broad as Christ’s. Narrowed in its sphere and in its service, the breadth of it is the marvel of the ages. Rich men like Nicodemus drew to him. Poor men

like Simon Peter loved him passionately. Women of beautiful character revered him. Women who were sunken would have died for him. Men who were lawless like the zealot Simon would have fought for him against the Roman army. And a centurion of that Roman army fell down at his feet and called him Master. Was there ever a life so broad as this? Was there ever a life so rich in understanding? He knew the publican. He knew the mother. He knew the sufferer. He knew the child. And every bird that winged across the heaven, and every flower that blossomed in the meadow, he saw, and, seeing, had these thoughts about them that oftentimes do lie too deep for tears. Intense with the intensity of God, he had the heart at leisure from itself. Feeling the infinite agony of Calvary, he felt the wonder and the joy of everything. Hating sin with an intense abhorrence, far more intense than we shall ever fathom, there was not a sinner from the streets of Magdala but somehow felt she had a friend in him. It is such things as these that baffle me when I turn my eyes to Jesus Christ. So eaten up with zeal, and yet so tranquil; so narrow, and

yet so infinitely broad. He had a baptism to be baptized with, and how was he straitened till it was accomplished—and yet he would dally with a little child, as if he had nothing else on earth to do.

Then in the third place, as I review that life, I find a singular union of failure and success.

I take it that when Christ was crucified, everybody thought that he had failed. Had you moved amid the crowds around the cross, that is the verdict you would have had from all. There was a time when he had seemed to triumph, and when the people had been enthusiastic. And they would have taken him and made him king, and they cried 'Hosanna to the son of David.' But now the moment of the cross was come, and all the glory seemed to have been quenched, and the one word to write across the story was the most pitiful word in human speech. Perhaps there were one or two women who still trusted. Women can trust when everything is dark. Women will still hope about a man when every other voice is crying shipwreck. And so it may be that on the day of Calvary here and there a lamp was still a-burning, each of them

tended by a woman's fingers. But ask the disciples what they thought of it—ask the workmen what they thought of it—ask that young student, with his weary eyes, who had listened to the Lord until he loved him. It was a splendid dream, but it was over now. It was a noble life, but it was ended. It was a fight for God in a corrupted church, and here at Calvary the church had won. Would Peter have written *triumph* on the cross? Could even John have written, *This is victory?* It was all dark to them, and all mysterious, for they had not grasped that he should rise again. If ever a service seemed to close in failure—failure dark and tragic and profound—it was the loving service of the Lord.

And then what happened? You all know what happened. On the third day he rises from the dead. Then there comes the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, and the conversion of three thousand souls. And Peter is off to Babylon to preach, and Paul is off to Rome to tell the news—and Augustine is on his way to England, and Columba is on his way to Scotland—until to-night throughout our western world, and to the farthest borders of the east, Christ is living—Christ is working—

Christ is powerful in ten thousand ways. Give any name you like to that brief life, you dare not call it by the name of failure now. In all that it has done for men and women it is magnificent in its success. And yet that service, so mighty and so wonderful—so rich in impulse for a million hearts—flows from a life that once, in human speech, was branded with the bitter name of failure.

Now as you go out to serve this winter, will you engrave that upon your heart? When a man is in earnest about Christian service he will be dogged and haunted by the sense of failure. I was talking the other evening to a doctor—a man who is well known in his profession—and he told me how frequently there came to him a sense of uselessness that was unbearable. And I could not help thinking if that were so with *him* who had but the body for his sphere of service, much more would it be so with *us* who handle the infinite mystery of soul. I want you to believe that when you fail you may be succeeding all the time. I want you to feel you may be doing most just when you think that you are doing nothing. I want you to look right back to Jesus

Christ, and to remember what they thought of him, and then to take you to your task again, leaving the issue in the hand of God. The one thing vital is that you persist. The one great treachery is to despair. To hold to it, when everything is gloomy, is the first task of every mortal man. And then some day, when all the gloom is passed, and the sun is shining and the wind is hushed, you will discover that your sorry failure was not quite so sorry as it seemed.

THE POWER THAT MAKES FOR POVERTY

Neither did he leave of the people to Jehoahaz but fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen ; for the king of Syria had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing.
—*2 Kings xiii. 7.*

I do not propose to regard this statement as a mere matter of ancient history. It hints at something that is more vital to us than the fortunes of a little state of long ago. Why was it that Jehoahaz had been conquered, and had fallen to be the tributary of Syria ? It was not just because Israel was weak ; it was because Israel was sinful. It was through sin that Israel lost her chariots, and the fine chivalry of her embattled horsemen, and the mustered regiments of her foot soldiery, once her boast and victory in God. In other words Israel was impoverished, and Israel was impoverished through sin. She had lost the riches of her strength, and lost them through forget-

fulness of God. And that is what I want to speak upon : how sin impoverishes—how it makes us poor ; how always, in your estate and mine, it takes away the glory of the chariot.

Now that is a supremely important thing to learn, because it is the thing which sin disguises. Sin comes to us without a word of poverty. It always comes with the promise to enrich. One sometimes marvels, after all these centuries, that men should still be in the power of sin. With all that wreckage on the shores of time, would not you think that men would flee from sin ? And part of the explanation is just this, that still, whenever a man is newly tempted, everything dark and dreadful is concealed, and sin comes with the promise to enrich. There is no promiser on earth like sin. It is magnificent in what it promises. All these kingdoms will I give thee—whatever the kingdom be that you are coveting. For there are men to whom power is but a name, and common ambition but a shred of tinsel, who yet have a hidden kingdom of desire. Whatever you are hungering and thirsting for, sin has the audacity to promise. It may be peace—it may be love—it may be influence with some one whom you love. And

what I want to impress upon you is that that promise always is a lie. In every sense that has a shade of meaning sin is the great power that makes for poverty.

Think first of the life of the imagination.

Now when we talk of the imagination we are apt to think only of the poets ; but remember that that gift is also yours, and without it your life would be intolerable. By it we take the past out of the hand of memory, and it lives again to cheer us and to soothe us. By it, in the dull pressure of the street, we have the hillside with us, where the sheep are feeding. By it we can always be with those who love us, as some day we shall be beside the river, seeing their faces as they answer ours, in the world where time and space are not. Imagination is the poet's glory. It is also the glory of the poor. They cannot travel, nor visit the broad world, nor see with the outward eye its wealth of beauty. And that is why the gospel to the poor—for that is the very mark of Christianity—has quickened the imagination so. When William Blake the poet was an old man, there came a lady one day to see him. And she was beautiful and rich, and she

had the world at her feet, as we express it. And Blake looked at her, as with a look of pity, and he put his hand upon her head and said, ‘My child, may God make the world as beautiful to you as it has been to me.’ Let a young man have a pure imagination and his world will be a world of glory. He may be poor, and his days may be monotonous, but life will be clad for him in royal splendour. And that is where the curse of sin comes in, defiling and polluting everything. Let it once creep into the imagination, and everything bright and beautiful is gone. Unto the pure all things are pure. The noble heart lives in a noble world. Unto the impure there is nothing pure, not even the white wing of sainted angel. And the world teems with horrible suggestion, in face and form, in meadow and in moor, and *that* is what I mean by poverty. It is not in what you have that life is rich. Life is really rich in what you see. One man may see more in a single beech-tree than another in twenty miles of his estate. Therefore I beg of you, watch your imagination. Do not degrade it to improper uses. Impoverished, life is not worth living, as there are some here to-night who know too well.

Then think again of the life of the affections.

There is a well-known passage in one of Scott's letters (a letter, if I remember aright, to Maria Edgeworth) in which he says that the finest education is the education of the heart. He means that if one's heart be dead, life must always be a thing of poverty. He means that if the affections be repressed, there is little gladness for us as we journey. And it is not hardship that strikes at the affections, nor the mutual bearing of any of life's burdens. What strikes at them and crushes them is *sin*. There are ties that are only bound the closer by common suffering and common loss. Knit in the heights when all the sky was golden, they may be knit still closer in the depths. But once let sin come in where the affections are, and where the human heart is knit with heart, and in that hour there begins decay. We talk sometimes of social sin. There is really no such thing as social sin. Sin, take it in any form you please, is the mightiest anti-social force on earth. It never binds, it always disunites. It never links, it always separates. It never yet since the first man was fashioned drew two human hearts into communion. Your little child goes singing through

the house, and it comes to you with all its thousand questions. But then some day it is silent, and it shrinks from you, and it looks guiltily when you approach. And you know in an instant that conscience is at work ; that something has been done which deserves punishment ; that sin is at its work of separation. Sin separates the mother from her child. Sin separates the husband from his wife. Let sin come into a Christian congregation and it will separate it into twenty parties. And what I say is that if life be rich just as life's ties are strong and true and tender, then sin which always crushes them is poverty. Never, I beg of you, make the great mistake that sin can draw you any nearer anybody. Never, I beg of you, make the great mistake that sin will rivet what goodness cannot rivet. Such ties are stubble in the stress of things. Such ties are misery when evening falls. For life is long and hard and very difficult, and passion, in the evening, is not power.

Then think again of the intellectual life.

One of the lessons we learn as life advances, is the strange union of character and intellect. We come to find, in ways that often frighten

us, that what we know is linked with what we are. When we are adolescent, things seem different. The intellect then seems to stand alone. We think it is always possible to know, quite independently of what we are. But life advancing teaches other lessons—shows us that our being is a unity—convinces us that even intellect is knit and intertwined with character. If books had the sole prerogative of knowledge, what a scene of ignorance would life be ! For there are thousands of people who will not read, and there are thousands of people who cannot read. Wearied with business, tired with its long day, and with little leisure when the task is over, what a shut world is that of books to them ! But there is one book that is never shut, and that is the close-printed book of life. Every morning opens a new page, and every evening sees that page completed. And there are chapters in it where we start afresh, and titles written clear on every chapter, and one is schooldays, and another suffering ; and one is labour, and another love. By everything we do, and all we bear, slowly our very intellect is brightened. By everything we shirk, and all we scamp,

slowly our very intellect is dulled. Out of the depths of us there comes a spirit that builds the mystic temple of the mind. Out of the depths of us there comes a devil that turns the temple into a prison-house. How often have I seen a Highland shepherd whose power of intellect I truly coveted. It was so just; it was so penetrative; it was so clear and certain in its judgements. And yet that man—why, his whole library was but the Bible and a book or two—he had ‘dwelt deep,’ and dwelling so, had seen. You never can know anything out of its true environment, and *God* is the environment of everything. You never can know anything out of its true environment—you never can know anything out of God. And that is where sin comes in, throwing us out of harmony, distorting everything because disowning him, and so insensibly and yet inevitably impoverishing the glory of the brain.

Then lastly think of the life of the soul.

The Bible, at the heart of it, is a revelation of the soul. It is with that it deals. It is for that it pleads. It is that which is its glory and its crown. The nation whose history it records,

was only great in the region of the soul. The characters who move across its pages are men to whom the soul was everything. The Christ who is its crowning gift lived and died that souls might be redeemed—‘Jesus, lover of my *soul*.’ It is the soul that looks through every eye. It is the soul that hears through every ear. It is the soul that moves into intelligence, and flashes upward in imagination. It is the soul that climbs into the sky, and finds the throne, and sees that God is there, not harsh and stern, but gentle and forgiving, infinitely pitying mankind. That is the soul, and now comes Jesus Christ, saying, ‘What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?’ Let him have all the world and lose that soul, and of what use is all the world to him? Lord of its acres, all are empty to him. Master of all its pleasures, they are weariness. Lost in himself, decayed and dead within, he needs no other hell to show his failure. I pray you to write this upon your memory, that sin alone impoverishes the soul. Trial cannot do it if you bear it well. Pain cannot do it if you take it bravely. Sin always does it—never fails to do it—is doing it now if you are living in it. Will

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you not then turn from sin to-night? Cannot you lay your finger on your besetting sin? Will you not go to Christ with that, and ask his help, and plead his promise, and confide in him? The chariots of God are twenty thousand. Why live uncharioted and unenriched? He that sinneth against me, says God, wrongeth his own soul.

THE TYRANNY OF TYPE

There are diversities of operations.—1 Cor. xii. 6.

THERE is a constant tendency in social life to reduce men to a common level. Society is not only an organ of expression ; it is an organ also of repression. Men who have spent their days in lonely places are often of unusual character. They are rugged and intensely individual ; they look on the universe with their own eyes. But when they remove into a crowded city, where a thousand interests are interwoven, immediately a social pressure is at work which silently makes for uniformity. Conformity, says Emerson in a great essay, is the virtue most in demand in society. Society has its standard, whether low or high, and by that standard it measures everybody. Hence is it that in social life there is increasingly felt the tyranny of type. Hence is it that in

advanced societies it is not easy for a man to be himself.

Now if that be true of social life, it is true also of religious life. One might almost take the words of Emerson and say, 'The virtue most in demand in *religion* is conformity.' In its origin, regarding it historically, there is nothing so individualistic as religion. It is born in a universe that is untenanted, save for the individual and his God. But gradually this solitary yearning finds itself echoed in the heart of multitudes, and then religion broadens into fellowship. It is no longer a solitary life: it has now risen into a social life. It has its wide and interlacing interests—its complex and multifarious relationships. And so, just as in secular society, though with far greater havoc here than there, you have in religion an increasing tendency to reduce everything to common levels. It is the constant danger of the church to have room only for one peculiar type. She is tempted increasingly to look askance on everything that does not conform to that. And it is when we are like to be overriden by what I call the tyranny of type, that we ought to remember the infinite divergencies which are indicated in

our text this evening. There is one God who worketh all in all. That is the bond of union and of unity. At the back of everything, as an unfailing reservoir, is the plenitude of his power and his grace. But then as from our earthly reservoirs there will flow water to serve a thousand purposes, so with the manifesting of the grace of God. To change the figure, sunshine is but one, yet how diverse are its operations. It touches the hedgerows, and they are green again. It falls on the waters, and the vapours rise. It lights on the sleeping lilies of the field, and they awake, and clothe themselves with scarlet, so that even Solomon in all his glory is not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore if God so work in nature, shall he not work as variously in grace? It is a temptation we must guard against, that of imposing our standards on the infinite. And on that temptation, and some correctives to it, as we see it in certain spheres of our religion, I should like to speak a word or two to-night. Firstly, let us think of conversion. Secondly, let us think of Christian character. Thirdly, let us think of Christian service.

Firstly, then, let us think of conversion.

In some of our old theological treatises we find what is called the *ordo salutis*. That is to say, everything is handled in a certain definite order of salvation. There are distinct and peculiar experiences, following each other in well-defined succession, and it is expected that every child of God will show these in his discipleship. In regard to conversion, this passion for conformity is best witnessed in revival times. It was so in Wesley's day, and it was so in Moody's, and it was so in the late Welsh revival. Men were scarce reckoned to have come to Christ—they were not soundly converted, as the expression is—unless they could bear personal testimony to a certain definite experience. That experience began in misery, through the convicting power of the Holy Ghost. Then it passed into agonising prayer, and then in an instant into light and liberty. And always there was the lurking feeling that if a man knew nothing of these depths and heights, it was at least a questionable thing if he was savingly united to Christ Jesus. That feeling, in our quieter times, is perhaps less prevalent than in revival times. It may be we have gained in breadth a little, if we have lost some-

what in intensity. Yet even now, when we speak of coming to Christ, or when we use that fine old word ‘conversion,’ is there not a tendency to exclude everything except one recognised experience?

Now against that craving for conformity I want to put you on your guard this evening. It is not by one road that men come to Christ. There are as many roads as there are hearts. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth. It is the chartered libertine, as Shakespeare calls it—the symbol and the sacrament of freedom. And so, says the Lord Jesus Christ, is every one that is born of the spirit : there is the freedom of the breeze in the new birth. It took the earthquake to convert the Philippian jailor, but it took no earthquake to open Lydia's heart. It took the glare of light to convert Paul, but there was no such light for the Ethiopian eunuch. The one was dazzled, and heard a voice from heaven, and was smitten to the earth, and blinded—and the other was quietly reading in his chariot. There are people who insist that every Christian must have a dated and definite conversion. There are

others, and they are poor psychologists, who have no faith in sudden conversion. But who art thou to limit the Almighty, either on this hand or on the other? The wind bloweth where it listeth, saith the Lord. We all know the hour of Paul's conversion—can you give me the hour of Timothy's conversion? From a child he had known the Holy Scriptures, and had been cradled in the love of Christ. For him the tide was not like that of Solway, rushing inland fleeter than the horseman: for him it was like our estuary tide, moving in sweet silence to the flood. There are men who have to starve in a far country, before they awaken to a Father's love. There are others who awaken to that love, who have never left the shelter of the home. There are men who have to be crushed into the dust by the convicting power of the Holy Ghost. There are others who are gently wooed and won. There is one God who worketh all in all. Beware of putting limits upon him. Give him his freedom when he stoops from heaven, to get into living touch with living men. On one man he will flash like lightning. On another like the sun he will arise. There are diversities of operations.

That thought is very beautifully hinted at in one of the visions of the Revelation. John saw a city—it was the heavenly city—and it had not one gate, but twelve. On the east three gates, and on the north three gates, and on the south three gates, and on the west three gates—it was John's commentary on his Master's word, 'Come unto me, and I will give you rest.' He had leaned upon that Master's bosom, and known the infinite riches in that little room, and now brooding upon all that, he saw these avenues. On the east three gates—then men shall come to him with the gladness of the sunrise on their brow. On the north three gates—then men shall come to him out of a bitter and a barren wind. On the west three gates—then men shall seek the city whose hopes have sunk like the sun into the sea. On the south three gates—then from a lovely land they will reach one who is altogether lovely. If you are travelling by the great north road, do not think that yours is the one road. If you have a friend upon the eastern highway, do not imagine that you must go with him. What I mean is, Take your own road to Christ ; the one important thing is to get there.

'Down to Gehenna, and up to the throne,
He travels the fastest who travels alone.'

Secondly, let us think of Christian character.

There is a word that Paul is fond of using in the opening of his letters to the churches. He addresses his converts by the name of saints—'unto the *saints* which are in Ephesus.' Now mark you, Paul was not writing to a few. He was writing to every one who was in Christ. He was not selecting a few outstanding Christians, when he wrote 'unto the saints which are in Ephesus.' He was thinking of the master and the slave—of the mother—of the soldier in the guard-room ; and what varieties of character were there it does not take much genius to discover. Unto the saints which were in Ephesus—and one of them would be a strong stern man, and one would be a shy and shrinking girl, and one a poet with his heart of music, and one would be a blundering agitator interfering with everybody's business, and one would be a dreamer of sweet dreams. Unto the saints which are in Ephesus—the point is that *all* of them were saints. There was room in the word, in its grand Pauline usage, for every variety of man in Christ. And you have but to

think what it means now, as you catch it falling from the lip, to recognise how it has been contracted. A saint? We all know what that connotes. Perhaps we have known a saint—she was our mother. And she was childlike, and gentle, and unworldly, and there was the light of heaven on her face. My sister, I know she was a saint; but where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty, and I want to ask you to-night what right you have to narrow to that type the grand old term. Cromwell, in that grim way of his, called his choicest regiment—*the saints*. They were not childlike: they were grizzled veterans, whose ears were ringing with the clash of steel. Saints? It sounds absurd to call them saints; and yet, mark you, Cromwell had the right of it; he knew that for the battered soldier there was sainthood as well as for the sweet and gentle soul. I want to see room made within the church for every type and variety of character. I want to see the man of action there, and the thinker and the scholar and the labourer. And I want each to feel that in the eyes of Christ there is no favoured or peculiar type, for there are diversities of operations.

Of course there is a certain general likeness between all who are in Jesus Christ. If we walk in the light, says the apostle, then have we fellowship one with the other. Just as men engaged in perilous callings are moulded broadly into a common likeness, so that the miner has his peculiar stamp, and the fisherman his bearing unmistakable; so in the perilous calling of the Christian there are powers as of the mighty deep at work, which silently impress a common likeness. A true Christian, whatever be his temperament, will always differ from a true Mohammedan. An ardent Buddhist could never be mistaken for an ardent follower of Jesus Christ. But the wonderful thing about that common life, in which all share who are in Jesus, is that it comes not to repress but to intensify the individuality. One of our sweetest Scottish poetesses is Lady Nairne. It is she who has given us 'The Land o' the Leal.' When she was young, she was a very gay young woman, but the hour struck when she was led to Christ. A weaker woman would have written hymns then, and the hymns might have been very beautiful, but Lady Nairne was never a weak woman, and she con-

tinued writing songs. She knew that there are diversities of operations. She knew that the gifts of God are without repentance. She knew that 'The Rowan Tree' could tell for Christ as surely as 'O Love that wilt not let me go.' And so, not without that richer music which comes when the windows are opened to the east, she abode in the calling wherein she was called.

Let me point out in passing how clearly this is shown in the case of the first disciples of our Lord. What you see in them all, as they accompanied with Christ, is the intensifying of their personality. One might have thought that a fellowship like Christ's would have had a certain repressing influence. It was so overpowering, that fellowship, it was so penetrative and commanding. But the strange thing is that so far from doing that, somehow it touched the strings of personality, and every man of them became himself when he became a follower of Jesus. Peter never grew like John. John was never the replica of Peter. Thomas—you would have known him anywhere, he was so gloomy and so doubting and so loyal. Each of them was empowered to become—not what his neighbour

nor what his brother was—but what he was *himself* in God's eyes, according to the pattern in the mount.

Lastly, and in a word or two, let us think of Christian service.

One of the most familiar scenes in Scripture is the fight of David and Goliath. To me the choicest moment of that scene is when David was getting ready for the fight. I see Saul lending him his armour, and it was a very honouring bestowal. I see David, restless and uneasy, handling the great sword as if he feared it. And then I see him laying all aside, and crying out, 'I cannot go in these,' and fingering his well-loved sling again. For *Saul* there was but one way of fighting. He had never dreamed of any other way. There was only one tradition in his chivalry, and every fighter must conform to that. But David, fresh from the uplands, and the morning, and the whispering of God among the hills, must have liberty to fight in his own way. The one was all for immemorial custom. The other was determined to be free. The one said, 'It has been always so,' and the other, 'I cannot go in these.' And remember that it was

not Saul who was in the line of God's election, but that young stripling from the Bethlehem pasturage who in his service dared to be himself.

'Now in our thought of Christian service, we need to be reminded of that scene. We must guard against narrowing our thought of service into half a dozen recognised activities. When Christ was on earth, the twelve disciples served him, and it was a noble and a glorious service. But have you exhausted the catalogue of services when you have named their preaching and their teaching? The woman who washed his feet was also serving, and Martha when she made the supper ready, and the mother who caught up her little child, and brought it to him that it might be blessed. 'I cannot go with these, I have not proved them. I cannot use the helmet and the shield.' Who wants you to? There are hands which can wield no sword, but which can carry a cup of water beautifully. There is something thou canst do in thine own way—something for which the church is waiting. Do *that*, and do it with thine heart, and perchance thou shalt do more than thou hast dreamed.'

THE PROBLEM OF PAIN

Neither shall there be any more pain.—Rev. xxi. 4.

THIS, as you all know, is Hospital Sunday, when our offerings are asked for our local hospitals. It is that fact which I have had in view in choosing my subject for to-night. I have already spoken on the doctrine of the body, for it is with the body that medical science deals : not with the body, however, in a state of health, but with the body in a state of pain and sickness ; and so I thought I would take this opportunity of speaking a little upon the problem of pain, a theme that reaches home to every man. Now please remember at the very outset that at the best I can but make suggestions. I am not quite so foolish as to imagine that I can settle a problem such as this. I can only give you certain points of view, some thoughts that may flash a little light upon the darkness ; but at

least I can truly say that I shall give you nothing that has not come with comfort to myself.

Now the problem of pain, I think I may assert, is in its full intensity a modern problem. There is to-day a sensitiveness to pain which in past ages was unknown. When you go back three or four centuries, you read of the most excruciating tortures. And you say how cruel must men have been in those days, when they could actually use these frightful instruments. Well, of course there was much cruelty about it, but remember there was also a certain callousness —an absence of that quivering sensibility which makes us shrink from suffering to-day. Still more conspicuously was this the case in the ancient world of Greece and Rome. It was a cruel and a callous world. It was not alive to the mystery of pain. Even the Book of Job, which deals with suffering, is not perplexed about the fact of suffering. It is the question why the *righteous* suffer that forms the burden of the Book of Job. The problem, then, is largely a modern one. It has become insistent in these latter days. Is it possible, think you, to find the reasons that may have led to this emergence?

Why, in other words, are we to-day more sensitive to pain than men were once? Why do we dwell on it more, and feel its pressure more, than men seem to have done in the old world? Let me suggest to you three reasons that may help to account for that new sensibility.

In the first place, the keener sensitiveness to pain springs partly from our new power of escaping it. The fact that we can so often cheat it now, has had the effect of calling attention to it. So long as anything is quite inevitable, we grimly and silently accept it. *Death* is inevitable —no man can escape it—and you and I seldom think of death. But just suppose that some man were to come and tell us a secret for escaping death—and would not the fact of death leap into prominence? So is it with the fact of pain. Men thought that pain was inevitable once. There it was, and one had just to bear it, and that was the end of the whole matter. But now, thanks to the discoveries of science, and to the wonderful appliances of Christian medicine, we look on pain in quite a different light. A doctor will actually come to you and say, ‘It is your duty *not* to suffer.’ I had a first-rate doctor who

once said to me, 'You have no right to suffer pain like that.' And it is just this sense that pain is not inevitable, but may be escaped from, and avoided somehow, that has helped to call attention to its problem.

A second reason for the pressure of the problem is to be found in the new sense of the solidarity of life. We feel our kinship now with all creation in a way that was undreamed of once. Men of course have always recognised that there was kinship between them and the dumb animals. But in bygone times it was not of *that* they thought ; it was rather of the chasm between man and beast. Now, thanks to the knowledge we have won, it is not on the chasm that thought is centred. It is on the wonderful closeness of the ties that link all living things into a unity. Now the moment you have built that bridge, there comes galloping over it the form of pain. For pain is universal in the world ; wherever there is life, there is suffering. And it is the new sense which we have gained of the suffering throughout the animate creation that has given to the matter a new prominence. You know how John Stuart Mill has dwelt on that.

You know how Huxley has dwelt on that. They have taken the pain of bird and beast and fish, and flung it in the very face of God. And what I say is that that new conception of the groaning and travailing of all creation helps to explain the pressure of the problem.

But there is another reason, as it seems to me. It is not scientific ; it is theological. It is the discovery we have made in these last days of the full humanity of Jesus. Can you detect the bearings of that upon the question ? Let me try in a sentence to explain it to you. Well, so long as the faith was viewed as a body of doctrine, so long there was little room in it for pain. It was with *sin* it dealt. It was on sin it centred. It was through sin it reached the love of God. But the moment that out of the mist of ages there stepped the figure of the man Christ Jesus, in that moment there flashed upon the world the recognition of the fact of pain. Here was the Christ, the very Son of God, and he was infinitely sensitive to pain. It was his passion to cure it when he met with it. For him it was a terrible reality. And I suggest that it is the human Christ who has become so real to us

to-day, who has made real to a thousand hearts the problem of our human suffering. Men are not deeply interested perhaps in dogma now; but they are deeply interested in Christ Jesus. They want to look at the world through Jesus' eyes in a way that was never thought of in past ages. And I think that when you get that standpoint, immediately, as in the days of Galilee, you are confronted not alone with sin, but also with the terrible spectacle of pain.

Now to show you the place that pain has in our being, there are one or two facts I want to bring before you. And the first is that our capacity for pain is greater than our capacity for joy. You experience, for instance, a great joy. Does that prolong its sway through the long months? Do you not know how it exhausts itself, and dies, as Shakespeare says, in its own too much? But now you experience great pain, and I never heard that *that* must needs exhaust itself—it may continue with a man for years. That means that our capacity for pain is deeper than our capacity for joy. It means that we are so fashioned by the infinite that the undertone of life is one of sorrow. And I mention that to

show you how our nature, when you come to understand it in the deeps, is in unison with the message of the cross.

Another fact which we shall pick up as we pass is this, that pain is at the root of life and growth. It is not through its pleasures but through its pains that the world is carried to the higher levels. You remember how Burns wrote about our pleasures ?

‘ But pleasures are like poppies spread,
 You seize the flow’r, its bloom is shed ’—

and that is not only true of men ; it is true also of the progress of the world. It is through suffering that we are born, and it is through suffering that we are fed. It is through agony that we have won our poetry ; it is through blood that we have reached our freedom. It is through pain —pain infinite, unutterable, the pain which was endured by Christ on Calvary—that you and I are ransomed and redeemed. Now that is a fact, explain it how you will, and we are here to-night to deal with facts. I do not deny that pain may be a curse—remember that it also is a power. We owe our laws to it, and all our art. We owe to it our immortal books and our

salvation. We owe to it the fact that we are here, and able to look the problem in the face.

And then the third fact I note is this, and to me it is of the deepest significance. It is the tendency which men have always had to think of pain as acceptable to God. We talk to-day of the duty of happiness till folk are almost tired of hearing of it. Now not for a single moment would I question that it *is* our bounden duty to be happy. But how significant and singular it is that in every country and in every age men should have looked on suffering and pain as something that was acceptable to God. You have it in the Roman knight who, to appease the gods, leaped into the chasm. You have it in the Indian fakir who sits for years in an attitude of misery. You have it in the pilgrim to the shrine; in the hermit and in the lonely anchorite; in every saint who ever scourged himself; in every savage who has made his offering. Whatever else that means (and it means much else), it hints at something mysterious in pain. Men feel instinctively that in the bearing of it there is some hope of fellowship with heaven. You may despise the hermit, and you may flout the saint

when the weals are red upon his back, but an instinct which is universal is something you do well not to despise.

That leads me to touch just for a moment upon the purifying power of pain, for that is more closely akin than we might think to the feeling that it pleases God. Now I am far from saying that pain *always* purifies. We have all known cases where it has not done so. We have known men who were hardened and embittered by the cup of suffering they had to drink. But on the other hand who is there here to-night who has not known some life that was transfigured, not by the glad radiance of its joy, but by its bearing of the cross of pain? How many shallow people has pain deepened! How many hardening hearts has it made tender! How many has it checked, and checked effectually, when they were running headlong to their ruin! How many has it weaned from showy things, giving a vision that was fair and true, and steadyng them into a sweet sobriety as if something of the unseen were in their sight! Pain may warn us of the approach of evil. It is the alarum-bell which nature rings. Pain may be used in the strong hand of God as a punishment

of the sin we have committed. But never forget that far above such ministries, pain, when it is willingly accepted, is one of the choicest instruments of purifying that is wielded by the love of heaven. Fight against it and it shatters you. All the tools of God have double edges. Rebel against it as a thing of cruelty, and all the light of life may be destroyed. But take it up, absorb it in the life, weave it into the fabric of the being, and God shall bring the blossom from the thorn.

And that thought, as it seems to me, may throw some light on the sufferings of the innocent. One of the hardest questions in the world is why the innocent should have to suffer so. There is no perfect answer to that question, nor ever shall be on this side the grave. But is there not at least a partial answer in what I have been trying to say? If pain were a curse, and nothing but a curse, well might we doubt the justice on the throne; but if pain be a ladder to a better life, then light falls on the sufferings of the innocent. It is not the anger of heaven that is smiting them. It may be the love of heaven that is blessing them. There are always tears and blood upon the steps that lead men heavenward to where the

angels are. Mark you, not by the fraction of a pennyweight does that lighten the guilt of him who causes suffering. It only shows us how the love of God can take the curse and turn it to a blessing.

So I am led lastly to consider this, What has the gospel done to help us to bear pain? I shall touch on three things which it has done.

In the first place it has quieted those questionings which are often sorcer than the pain itself. It has helped us to believe that God is love, in the teeth of all the suffering in the world. Have you ever noticed about Jesus Christ that he was never *perplexed* by the great fact of pain? Death troubled him, for he groaned in spirit and was troubled when he stood before the grave of Lazarus. But though the fact of death troubled his soul, there is no trace that the dark fact of pain did so—and yet was there ever one on earth so sensitive to pain as Jesus Christ? Here was a man who saw pain at its bitterest, yet not for an instant did he doubt his Father. Here was a man who had to suffer terribly, and yet through all his sufferings God loved him—it is these facts which, for the believing soul, silence the

obstinate questionings for ever. We may not see why we should have to suffer. We may not see why our loved ones have to suffer. Now we know in part and see in part ; we are but children crying in the night. But we see Jesus, and that sufficeth us. We see how he trusted. We know how he was loved. And knowing that, we may doubt many things, but we never can doubt the love of God again.

In the second place it has helped us here by giving us the hope of immortality. It has set our pain in quite a new environment—the environment of an eternal hope. I wonder if you have ever thought of the place and power of hope in human suffering ? Hope is mighty in all we have to do ; but it is mighty also in all we have to bear. When once you get the glow of a great hope right in the heart of what you have to suffer, I tell you that that suffering is transfigured. Two people may have to endure an equal agony—taken abstractly, the pains are much alike,—but the one sufferer may be a hopeless man, and the other a woman with the hope of motherhood : and who shall tell the difference there is in the bearing of everything that must be borne, through the

presence or the absence of such hope? It is just there that Jesus Christ steps in. He has brought immortality to light. Our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us an exceeding weight of glory. Out of Christ we thought it was unending. We thought we never should have strength to bear it. But now, against the back-ground of the glory, our light affliction is *but for a moment.*

Then lastly Christ has helped us to bear suffering by the medical science and skill he has inspired. And I close with that, just mentioning it because I am speaking on Hospital Sunday. It has been pointed out again and again that in the pagan world were no such things as hospitals. There were many noble women in that world, but not one of them ever dreamed of being a sick nurse. As a simple matter of historical fact, our hospitals are in the world to-day, *not* because men are tenderer of heart, but because Jesus lived and Jesus died. Without Christ we had had no Florence Nightingale—think what that would mean for British soldiers! Without Christ we would never have had Lord Lister—think what that would have meant for countless sufferers! Without Christ

there had not been lying yonder, in the hospital which is so near me as I speak, poor men and women who are being tended by the finest skill that riches could command. For this thing will I be enquired of, saith the Lord. Yes, take a calm look at it to-night. Tell me if you have ever realised what Jesus Christ has done for this community. If you have, go out and reverence him. Go out into the night and call him wonderful. Go out into the night and say, 'God helping me, I shall follow that leader to the end.'

REFUSING TO GO IN

And he was angry, and would not go in.—Luke xv. 28.

I HAVE often spoken on this beautiful parable, and I hope often to speak on it again. It is so full of teaching and so full of hope that in a life-time one could not exhaust it. I think I have even spoken on this verse to you when discussing our duties to our equals. But to-night I choose it for a different purpose, and I want to put it in a different setting. I want to look at this brother in the parable as the type of the man who will not enter into a love that is too big for earth, and into a household that is home indeed. '*And he was angry, and would not go in.*' Are there not multitudes in that condition? They see the gleaming of the lights of home, and there is the sound of music in their ears. And yet though they know that they would have a welcome, and add to the gladness of it all by entering, somehow or

other, like the brother here, they stand in the cold night outside the door. I am not speaking to those to-night who have accepted Christ, and know his fellowship. I am speaking to those so near to door and window that they see the light and hear the sound of music. And yet though the night is over them and round them, and they are hungry and the feast is there, somehow or other they will not go in. Let me ask you in passing to lay this to heart, that no one will ever force you in. God is too careful of our human freedom to drag us against our will into his home. You must go willingly or not at all. You must make up your mind to go, and do it. And probably there is no hour so fit for that as just this hour which you have reached to-night.

There are two things about which I want to speak in connection with the conduct of this brother. First, I want to look at the reasons which kept him from entering the home that night. Second, I want to find out what he missed because he thus refused to enter.

First, then, looking at the man, why was it that he refused to enter? I think to begin with that this was in his heart, that he could not

understand his father's ways. Doubtless he had always loved his father. Doubtless he had always honoured him. He had never before questioned his sagacity, or dreamed of thinking of him as unjust. But now, in the hour of the prodigal's return, when the house was ablaze with light and loud with merriment, all he had cherished of his father's justice seemed to be scattered to the winds of heaven. Was *this* the way to receive back a prodigal? Was not this to put a premium on folly? Was it fair to him, so faithful and so patient, that a reckless ne'er-do-weel should have this welcome? He could not understand his father's ways. Is this the only man who has stood without because of irritating thoughts like that? Are there none here who will not enter because they cannot understand the Father's dealings? They cannot fathom the mysteries of providence. They cannot understand the cruelties of nature. They cannot grasp the meaning of the cross, or see the power of the death of Jesus. Am I speaking to any one who feels like that—who cannot understand the Father's dealings? I want to say to you that the one way to learn them is to come at once into the home. For the ways

of God are like cathedral windows which to those outside are dim and meaningless, and only reveal their beauty and their story to those who are within.

I think again this man refused to enter because he was indignant with his brother. He was indignant that one with such a character should have a place at all within the house. It is not likely that he ever loved his brother, and perhaps his brother had never much loved him. There was such a difference between their natures that they could hardly have been the best of comrades. For the one was always generous to a fault, and always getting into trouble somewhere; and the other was a pattern of sobriety, and as cautious as he was laborious. Such Jacobs, and they are found in every region, are always a little contemptuous of Esaus. Secretly they despise them and their singing, and they cannot understand why people love them. And when they find that they are home again, and that all the household is in revelry, then are they angry and will not go in. So was it with this person in the parable. He was not only angry with his father; he was deeply indignant that in the house of gladness a man should be tolerated

such as his brother was. And I know many who are standing out—who are angry and will not go in—for a reason precisely similar to that. I remember a young man coming to me in Dundee to tell me why he would never join the church. It seemed that in the place of business where he worked there was a young woman who made a great profession. And all the time that she was busy in attending meetings and acting as a monitor, she was engaged in pilfering the till. '*And he was angry, and would not go in.*' He was very indignant with his sister. He said, 'If these are the kind of people who are *in*, then it is better that I should be *without*.' And I tell you there are many just like that, who would come in and get their welcome, if it were not for what they have seen in you—if it were not for what they have seen in me. My brother, standing in the darkness there, there is a great deal to justify your attitude. But why do you leave the happiness to *us* when we are such prodigals and so unworthy of it? Come in yourself to-night out of the cold. Bring your enthusiasm and your courage with you. And not only will you receive a blessing, but you will be a blessing to us all.

I think again this man refused to enter because he trusted to the reports of others. He did what is always a foolish thing to do—he went on the information of the servants. Had he gone right in and seen things for himself, the night for him had had a different issue. One look at his brother might have softened him, there were such traces of hell about his face. But instead of that he went to the stable door, where the ostler was loafing and listening to the music, and he, the first-born of his father's family, was content to get his information *there*. Now of course we know that he was told the truth. 'Thy brother is come, and they are making merry.' But might not the truth be told in such a way as would irritate and rankle just a little? It is always the prodigals whom the servants love. It is always the prodigals they like to serve. And there would be just a touch of pleasing malice in it, when they told the elder brother what had happened. '*And he was angry, and would not go in.*' It was partly the servants' tone that made him angry. He took his report of that most glorious night from men who knew nothing of its inner mystery. And what I say is that

it is often so, and that there are multitudes outside to-day because they have taken the report of others who are incapable of judging rightly. Are you quite sure that your reports of Jesus are taken from those who know him and who love him? Are you quite sure that in your thoughts of Christ there is no travesty of what is true? You must especially beware of that, young man, in an age like this when every one is talking, and when a thousand judgements are passed on Jesus Christ by men who have never touched his garments' hem. I beg of you to believe that in the gospel there is something that lies beyond the reach of intellect. There is something which is never understood except by those who have experienced it. And therefore if you are in earnest and are wise you will take no verdict upon the cross of Christ, except the verdict of the man or woman who has experienced its saving power.

So far then on the older brother's reasons. Now will you let me show you what he missed? Well, to begin with, you must all agree with me that the man missed just what he most needed. Think of it, his day's work was over. He was coming home in the evening from the

field. Like a faithful servant he had been hard at work, driving the furrow or building up the fences. I honour him for that quiet and steady toil, and for being not above the servant's duty. There would be more prosperous farms and prosperous businesses, if sons to-day would follow his example. Now the labours of the day were over. 'The ploughman homewards wends his weary way.' And he was hungry and he needed food. He was weary and he needed rest. He was soiled and stained with his day's work, and he wanted a change of raiment in the evening—and all that he needed in that evening hour was stored and treasured in his father's house. '*And he was angry, and would not go in.*' He missed the very things that he was needing. All that would freshen him and make him strong again, he lost because he stayed outside the door. He was a soiled, a weary, and a hungry man, and everything was ready for the taking, yet no one forced him to the taking of it when he deliberately stood without. Is not that always the pity of it, when a man refuses the love of Jesus Christ? Is he not missing just what he most needs, and needs the

more, the more he has been faithful? For all of us are soiled and we need cleansing; and all of us are weak and we need strength, and all of us are hungering and thirsting, and Christ alone can satisfy that hunger. My brother and sister, I want you to come in not to please me, but for your own sake first. I want you to come in, because to-night just what you need is waiting you in Christ. I want you to come in because that heart of yours is restless and unsatisfied and hungry; because when you were tempted last you fell, and you are missing the very thing you need.

But not only did the man miss what he needed; he also missed the merriment and gladness. He missed what some folk would not miss for worlds—he missed an excellent dance and a good supper. Think of him, standing out under the stars, a man alone and out of touch with everybody. Have not you felt it when there was some fine gathering, and you were not one of the invited? And then, to make it worse to bear, the sound of the music floated through the yard, and he could see how happy they all were, as the figures passed beyond the lighted window. The

man was bitten by the fiercest jealousy. He was hurt ; he was offended ; he was miserable. Every one was joyous except him. Every one was in the light but he. And the strange thing is that in all the countryside there was not a man who would have been more welcome, nor one who had a better right and title to the gladness and the feasting of the night. Ah ! what a right some of you have to know the joy and feasting of the Lord ! How you have been prayed for since you were little children ! How hearts at home have yearned for you in tears ! And yet to-day you are the very one—you who have had an upbringing like that—who stand without, and will not enter in, and miss the gladness of the Lord Jesus Christ. I want you to come right in to-night. You are far more lonely than some people think. I want you to have the gladness of religion, instead of your little petty evanescent gladness. I want you to feel that in the love of Christ, with all its strengthening and all its saving, there is just that deep strong joy that you are missing, and always will miss till you pass the door.

Then tell me, did he not miss one thing

more? Did he not miss his chance of making others happy? Although I daresay he never thought it so, his absence was the one shadow on that feast. He was not, I take it, a very lovable person, and for that matter perhaps you are not that either. He was not at all the kind of man we know, who is the life and soul of any gathering. And yet that night—that night and that alone—*his* presence would have been the crowning gladness; his absence was the one dark shadow upon a happiness which was like that of heaven. Do you think the prodigal could be at peace until his brother had come in and welcomed him? Could the father be happy when there was one a-wanting? one whom he loved and honoured for his toil? And all the time, bitter and angry-hearted, the man outside was missing his great chance, a chance that it is worth living years to win—the chance of making other people happy. Have you ever thought, young men and women, of the happiness you would give by coming in? If you have never thought of it before, I want you to think of it to-day. What of your mother, who has toiled and prayed for you? What of your father,

though he never says much? What of that friend whose eyes would be so different if you were but a faithful soul in Christ? What of the angels in their ranks and choirs who are waiting to rejoice when you are saved? What of Jesus Christ, the lover of mankind, who would see of the travail of his soul and would be satisfied? I beg of you not to miss your opportunity. It is a great vocation to make others glad. I would call you to it even if it were hard, and meant the sacrifice of what was dearest. But the wonderful thing about our Lord is this, that when you trust him, and make others glad, in that very hour you become glad yourself, and win what you have craved for all along.

THE SORROW OF THE SEA

There is sorrow on the sea.—Jer. xl ix. 23.

I READ lately in one of our magazines an article entitled the ‘Song of the Sea.’ It was written by an Irish priest, and was full of the witchery of the Celtic genius. One seemed to hear the lapping of the waters, under the sunshine, along the shores of Galway ; nor were there wanting those sterner and grander notes that make the majesty of ocean music. The sea has its own song, in many moods, and you and I are familiar with that melody. It has seemed like the echo of our souls sometimes, and voiced what we could ne’er express. But if the sea has its peculiar song, the sea also has its peculiar sorrow, and it is that which is referred to in our text. There is a sorrow of the hills, where men have died battling for liberty. There is a sorrow of the plains, where the mighty battles of history have been

fought. There is a sorrow peculiar to the valleys, where flood and avalanche have wrought their havoc ; and there is also a sorrow of the sea. I want to dwell upon that to-night a little. I want to touch upon some of the features of it. Everything else has been dwarfed for us these days by the appalling disaster which has happened.¹ And so the beauty—the fascination—of the ocean we shall leave for a more convenient season, and to-night I shall try to unfold to you some features of the sorrow of the sea.

One of the first, then, to arrest me is how often this sorrow is a sudden sorrow. There is a tragic swiftness in its onset, which sends a strange thrill through every heart. Of course it is not always so. The sea has other than unexpected tragedies. There have been long days, each like an eternity, when men were dying of thirst upon the deep. But far more often there is the mark of suddenness, there is a swift and awful unexpectedness, there is a hurrying from time into eternity in the peculiar sorrow of the sea. One moment everything is usual ; the next there is horror and dismay. One moment life is at its

¹ Preached on the Sunday evening after the *Titanic* disaster.

ordinary ; the next there is darkness and the deeps. One moment men are busy with their duties, or are playing, or are peacefully asleep ; the next they are face to face with death. It is this element of tragic swiftness that makes the ocean sorrow so appalling. For we all know that we must die, and that in the midst of life we are in death. But when at night, without a moment's warning, death comes, and claims a thousand victims, the hardest heart that mocks at our mortality is hushed by the awful contrast of it all.

Indeed, you will let me say in passing, such a swift sorrow is apt to be *too* commanding. Its very suddenness is apt to stagger us, in a way that a slow grief could never do. In all grief there is a blinding power. It has a singular genius for making us forget. And so we lose our faith, and we doubt God, and we wonder if there is a ruler of the universe. But if this is true of every kind of grief, it is truest of all of griefs that are disasters, that leap on us with staggering intensity, like bolts out of a sky of blue. Unprepared, we have not hearts to meet them. We have scarce time to summon our

religion. We have not an hour to put our armour on, for the enemy is thundering at the gate. And so it is that in the sorrow of the sea—although the ways of God are in the sea—there is often an element that makes it doubly hard to continue trusting in his providence. We forget what thousands of ships to-night are voyaging safely to their desired haven. We forget what multitudes of men are on the deep, and safe upon the deep. The suddenness, the tragic unexpectedness that is one mark of the sorrow of the sea, is very apt to blind us for a little.

Another mark of the sorrow of the sea is that it is a sorrow which is inaccessible. There is an element of loneliness about it that adds to the darkness of it all. When some great grief is falling on our home, there is a summoning of the members of the home. Some of course may be far out of reach; but there are generally others within call. And in an hour or two, or in a day or two, from the lone glen, or from the city, the sons and daughters are gathered by the bed. Loving faces look on one they love. There is the felt presence of familiar forms. There is the touch of hands, there is the sound of voices,

which come with the gentle ministry of rest. But of all this, in the sorrow of the sea, there is not, and there never can be, anything: spite of the thousand ships upon its bosom, its sorrow is a sorrow inaccessible. Tidings may be flashed of what is happening, but will they bring the others who are dear? The air may quiver with messages for help, but can any one summon the love from the old home? There is an element of inaccessibility—a calling out for what can never come—which is always present in, and always deepens, what the prophet calls the sorrow of the sea. Like life, the sea is often lonely, even when the sunshine is upon it. No highland glen, sleeping amid the hills, so touches us with the deep sense of solitude. And it is this which darkens down so terribly into an agony which we shall never know, when there is shipwreck, and when death is near, and when there is sorrow on the sea.

I note again, as a third element, how often this sorrow has the power of purifying. I know no sorrow that has made men so noble as the dark and terrible sorrow of the sea. Of course it has not been always so. There have been instances the very opposite. There have been hours of

shipwreck when men have forgotten their manhood, and fallen to the level of the beast again. But far more often, let us thank God for it, not only in modern but also in distant times, the sorrow of the sea has been a trumpet call to all that is noblest in the heart of man. There is a great deal in our life to-day that might make us think that chivalry was dead. It is not easy to believe in chivalry as you watch the bustle and push of a great city. And you begin to wonder if there are heroes now, and if men are not selfish beyond reclamation, and if the heart has not been shrivelled up in the burning furnaces of competition. Then, flashing across the world to us, there come the tidings of sorrow on the sea. And with it there come to us such other tidings of all that is most glorious in humanity, that we can never be pessimists again. Men for whom life was sweet have laid their lives down. They have been brave and quiet in the wildest of it. They have remembered the women and the children. They have had compassion for the weak. And all this, mark you, on the part of men whom you and I yesterday might have called worldly, and in whose hearts we might have

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found it difficult to see the glowing of the purer flame. It is a lesson to us against judging. You never know what elements are latent. You never know what spark of heavenly fire may leap from the dull ashes of a soul. And what I say is that the sorrow of the sea, not only yesterday, but on a hundred yesterdays, has had a singular power of drawing forth all that is finest in the heart of man.

Indeed, let me say in passing, it would seem as if this was one great office of the sea. It would seem as if God had appointed as its office the evoking of the heroic in humanity. It has been the office of the hills to quicken and sustain the love of liberty. It has been the office of the valleys to give to our dull race the charm of song. And it has been the office of the plains to foster that patient and enduring toil without which no land is ever rich, and no harvests ever ripen in the sun. God has his work for hill and plain to do. God has his work for every gentle valley. And the sea also is his, for he has made it. Shall it not also have its appointed office? I think that unquestionably it *has* that office, and all through the centuries has been exercising it, in the evoking

within the human heart of the priceless quality of heroism. What heroes the first navigators were ! Did you ever think of their heroic daring ? There were no charts for them—no lighthouses—no sound of bell upon the lonely reef. And always from that hour to this, when men have been tempted to take their ease and comfort, they have been stirred again to the heroic temper by the mystical summons of the sea.

Once more, the sorrow of the sea is a sorrow that makes no distinction. It gathers all, of every condition, under the dark shadow of its wing. There is a sorrow which only the poor know in their unceasing struggle with adversity. There is a sorrow which only the rich know, for riches carry their own harassments. But in the peculiar sorrow of the sea there is something which runs deeper than distinctions. ‘The rich and the poor meet together there, for the Lord is the Maker of them all.’ It is, indeed, one mark of our great hours that they break down the barriers which divide us. It is not our deep life, it is our surface life, it is the trifles of our common day which separate. When a great hour comes, of suffering or of song, it draws us into fellow-

ship again, and touches us with a new sense of kinship. There is a fine scene in Sir Walter Scott's *Antiquary*, which I am sure many of you will remember. It is where Sir Arthur Wardour and his daughter are caught on the shore by the advancing tide. And then they see old Edie Ochiltree approaching — Edie Ochiltree the beggar. Think of the social gulf in old-time Scotland between the beggar and the proud laird ! And it is one of those touches which make Scott supreme, and place him in the company of Shakespeare, that in danger and storm and amid warring elements the beggar and the laird are knit together. ‘Good man,’ said Sir Arthur, ‘can you think of nothing ? I ’ll make you rich —I ’ll give you a farm.’ ‘Our riches will soon be equal,’ said the beggar, looking out upon the strife of waters ; ‘Our riches will soon be equal, they are sae already.’ What a commentary on these words of Edie in the disaster of last Sunday night ! One hour, this man a millionaire, and that man with five pounds in his pocket. And then the crash and the upheaval, and the facing of death and of eternity—and ‘our riches will soon be equal,’ said the beggar. I want you to think

upon the homes where to-night there is mourning for the lost. What are they like? How do they look to you? I shall tell you what I see. Some of them are humble cottages in the quiet and beautiful villages of England. Some of them are poor homes in mean streets, where every feature seems to speak of struggle. Some of them are fair mansions in the country, with the glory of ancestral trees around them. Some of them are gorgeous palaces. '*Our riches will soon be equal,*' said the beggar. The sorrow of the sea makes no distinction. It is not partial, nor exclusive, nor nicely selective and discriminative. The young and old, the fragile and the strong, the rich, the poor, the powerful, the ne'er-dae-weel, there is room for them all in the great love of God—and room for them in the sorrow of the sea.

Then lastly, for I must not keep you, there is one other feature of this sorrow. It is a sorrow which, with peculiar power, unites the whole world in sympathy. When one is looking for those old Celtic chapels which were the earliest sanctuaries of our forefathers, it is not inland that one looks for them; it is close by the margin of the ocean. And why? Because in these far-off

days the land was shagged, and trackless, and impassable : it was not the land that united, but the sea. We speak and speak rightly of the sea as separating ; but remember that the sea also unites. There have been ages when the only highway was the open highway of the ocean. But not alone in the highway she affords does the sea unite the countries of the world : she does it too by the sorrows that she brings. When a calamity befalls a *land*, it wears a national complexion. It is very especially that country's grief, and only that country can know its full intensity. But when a calamity befalls at *sea*, even that national feeling is transcended, and the whole world feels a common blow. It is common ground where the deeps roll. Where the icebergs float is universal territory. To-day the passing voices may be English there. To-morrow they may be German or Sclavonic. And so it is that when disaster comes, on the high seas, where every flag may fly, there is a drawing together of the nations. In these past days we have experienced that. We have seen in action what I am trying to say. There is scarce a parliament, scarce a municipality in the civilised world but has expressed its grief. And

I know not anything else that could evoke that grief, so spontaneously, so generously, as the impact of an ocean sorrow. In the mysterious ways of God, that may be one meaning of such sorrow. ‘He hath made of one blood all the nations of the earth.’ He may be drawing them together so. If so, such tragedies may not be vain, but may be helping on that coming day when the world will have wakened in the Lord Jesus Christ to the glory of the brotherhood of man.

‘God grant His peace to those who sleep
In the abysmal darkness of the deep ;
God grant His peace.
A multitude of souls, stripped naked in a night,
Have passed to Silence. Yet through prison bars,
Even of Death, still shine the circling stars,
And those who sleep shall wake.
The sun that sunk blood-red
Shall rise, and in the shining resurrection light
The sea give up its dead.’



ETERNAL LIFE

I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.—John x. 10.

AMID all the mysteries which engirdle us there is none deeper than the mystery of life. We recognise life by a thousand evidences, and yet we know not what it is. When we see the surging crowd upon the streets, under the glaring lamps of a great city ; when we watch the children, in their light-hearted glee, come pouring from the school when it is over, we whisper to ourselves, What life is there ! And yet, though it looks at us through countless eyes, and speaks to us through innumerable voices, what that life is which is so manifested remains one of the hidden things of God. We probe for it with the lancet, and it flees us. We have our hand on it, and it escapes. It meets us in the surging of the city, and in the quietness of nature's solitudes. And

yet this life, familiar as the sunshine, and common as the sand upon the shore—what is it? We know not what it is.

Now if that be true of all life, as we encounter it in common days, much more may we expect it to be true of what the Scripture calls eternal life. That may be something which we can perceive. It may be something which we can enjoy. It may have qualities which flash upon us, and tell us that eternal life is there. But if the life in any tiniest weed is something unfathomable and untoachable, eternal life must be a secret too. If a child's story-book in a foreign tongue is given you, and you cannot understand a word of it, it is scarcely likely that you will comprehend a poem by a genius in that language. Nor is it likely that we will ever fathom the profound mystery of life eternal, when we are baffled daily by life's rudiments. What do you mean by life eternal, is perhaps a question you may ask of me. Well then, in our Scottish fashion, I shall ask you a question in return. What is that life which waves in the green grass? what is that life which dances in the butterfly? what is that life which looks as from the depths through the eager eyes of little

children? There is an agnosticism which is the child of pride. There is another which is the child of wisdom. It is a great step upon the road to light when a man will bow the head and say, I do not know. Even our Lord, though he was the Son of God, was not above that honouring humility, for of that day and hour, he said, knoweth no man, not even the Son, only the Father.

And yet though all life be a mystery, and though the springs of it be wrapped in darkness, I want you to remember that it was this mystery which was the great message of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sum up his gospel in a single word, and that one word is life. Get at the heart of all he had to teach, and life is nestling against that heart. One thought determines every other thought; one fact interprets and arranges everything, and that one fact, so dominant and regal, is the deep fact of life. Deeper than faith, for faith is but a name, unless it issue from a heart that lives; deeper than love, though God himself be love, for without life love would be impossible, life is the rich compendium of the gospel, and the sweet epitome of its good news, and the word that

gathers into its embrace the music and the ministry of Christ. Of course like the perfect preacher that he was, Christ was ever varying his message. He did not always harp on the same string. He did not always knock with the same summons. He cast his message in a hundred forms, in his consuming earnestness to save, for every heart has its own Open Sesame, and will not open to any other call. No words could be more occasional than Christ's. No life could be less trammelled by routine. No word that he spoke, no deed he ever did, but fitted the moment with a perfect niceness. Yet always, underneath that large variety, which is the freedom of the Son of God, there was the undertone of life eternal. 'The words that I speak unto you,' he said, 'they are spirit and they are life. I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly.' 'I am the way,' he said, 'the truth, the life.' 'I am the resurrection and the life.' All that he came to teach—all that he was—is summed and centred in that little word.

Now the very fact that Jesus spoke of life so is our assurance that life is a good thing. Whatever it be, in its unfathomed depth, it must be

good since Christ has spoken so. When I recall the life of Jesus, I sometimes wonder that he did not weary of it. Baffled on every hand, and disappointed, was there anything in that life to make it sweet? He was no dreamer in a shady solitude where all the voices of the world were calling peace. ‘He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.’ Always, upon his sunniest hour, there was the shadow of the cross of Calvary. Always beside him, in his frankest moment, were the suspicious eyes of his betrayer. And yet that Christ whose life was so environed — who could not move without the serpents hissing—held to it that life was a good thing. *This* was the human life that he had known, yet ‘I am come that they might have life,’ he said. Baffled and bruised, he never longed for death. He never preached the solace of the grave. He preached that life is good, not in its trappings, but in that secret which we can never fathom : ‘I am the resurrection and the life.’ It is just there that Jesus Christ our Lord stands separated by all the world from Buddha. For Buddha was so touched by human pain that he wanted to have done with life for

ever. But Christ, who knew a sorrow far more terrible than had ever fallen on the heart of Buddha, tells of a life that is to be eternal. He was not manifested to take life away : he was manifested to take death away. There are a million Buddhists in Asia to-night who believe that the last enemy which shall be destroyed is life. But Jesus Christ has never spoken so, nor has the gospel which conveys his spirit. It is our hope—it is our trust—that the last enemy which shall be destroyed is death.

Along that line, then, we come to understand what is the meaning of eternal life. We see, for instance, that eternal life is something different from immortality. Christ did not come that we might have immortality. We should have had immortality without him. We are not immortal because Christ was born, and because he died for our sins upon the tree. We are immortal by the touch of God who in his sovereign pleasure has created us, and in whose gift there is the stamp and seal of an existence that shall never cease. Immortality is the Creator's heritage. Eternal life the gift of Jesus Christ. We are immortal whether we will or no. We cannot stamp out

life by any suicide. But eternal life we can refuse. It is a gift, and we can spurn the gift : 'Ye will not come to me that ye might have life.' 'This day,' said Jesus to the dying thief, 'This day thou shalt be with me in paradise.' Brought into living touch with Jesus Christ, he had won the secret of eternal life. Both malefactors had immortal souls, and both would live for ever although crucified, but only for the one was there a paradise, with the Lord walking there among the lilies.

Now perhaps we shall understand that deep distinction best by touching on what we notice every day. It is the difference between mere existence and living in the true sense of the word. I take it that for all of us here to-night there are periods when we just exist. We rise and sleep, we eat and do our work, but we are dull and heavy and inert. There is no gladness when the morning comes; there is no swift response to our environment, and it is always upon that response that the wealth or poverty of life is based. And then what happens? Something like this happens. There comes to us an hour when all is changed. Sorrow may do it—

some great call may do it—the mystical touch of a great love may do it. And every one we meet is different now, and every sound has got a different music, and yesterday we existed like the beasts, and to-day, in that deepening, we live. Something like that, as I conceive it, is the difference between immortality and life eternal. I mean they are not different in kind. I mean they are different in degree. Eternal life is but our immortality quickened into its fulness by the Christ, touched by his love, wakened by his call, into a glory that is life indeed. You must exist or you could never live. It is the one that makes the other possible. The one is the harp of life—and then comes love, and with its master-hand draws out the music. So up and down the chords of immortality there moves the hand that was once pierced for us, and then, and only then, there sounds the music which is eternal life. Deep down below the special gift of Christ there is the universal gift of God. He is the God of Abraham and of Isaac. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And then comes Christ, and by his love and passion, and by the breathing of the Holy Ghost, he deepens—



heightens—brightens immortality into the splendour of eternal life.

Put in another way that just means this, that Christ is thinking of quality not quantity. Life is eternal in virtue of its quality, rather than in virtue of duration. You can never measure life by its duration. The two are not commensurate at all. We take the equal hours that the clock gives, and we mould them in the matrix of the heart. And one shall seem to us to be unending, it is so weighted with a leaden sorrow ; and another shall have but flashed upon us when it has passed away, and that for ever. There have been hours for you when you have lived more than in the passage of a hundred days. There have been moments when you have seen more deeply than in the gropings of all a heavy winter. Life mocks at time. Life will not recognise it. Life tramples in disdain upon the calendar. Life's truest measurement is never quantity. Life's truest measurement is quality. Think you that because two men have lived till seventy the one life must be equal to the other ? Think you that Christ, who died at thirty-three, had not lived more than many a man of seventy ? It is

not length of years that makes the difference. It is the depth of it. It is the quality. The question is not how long a man may live; the question is how much. It was of *that* that Christ was thinking when he spoke of life eternal. Not even he could lengthen out its span, for God had made it immortal at the start. He was not thinking of the flight of years. He was thinking of the depth of being. He was thinking of a life so full and deep that the very thought of time has passed away. When a river is dry and shallow in the summer-time, you see the rocks that rise within its bed. And they obstruct the stream, and make it chafe, and fret it as it journeys to the ocean. But when the rains have come, and the river is in flood, it covers up the rocks in its great volume, and in the silence of a mighty tide, flows to its last home within the sea. It is not longer than it was before. It is only deeper than it was before. Measure it by miles, it is unchanged. Measure it by volume and how different! So with the life that is the gift of Jesus. It is not longer than God's immortality. It is only that same river deepened gloriously, till death itself is

hidden in the deeps. Knowledge is perfected in open vision ; love is crowned in an unbroken fellowship ; service at least shall be a thing of beauty, fired by the vision of the God we serve. That is eternal life, and that alone. That is its difference from immortality. That is the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ to the immortal spirit of mankind.

In closing I should like you to observe that in the eyes of Jesus all that life was one. There was no break in it. It was continuous. It carried over the first into the last. He that believeth *hath* everlasting life—it is not something we are still to get. ‘He that believeth in me shall never die’—death is an incident in continuity. Wonderful as life beyond shall be, and exquisite beyond our wildest dream, remember that at the heart of it it will not differ from the life we know. Take the parable of the talents, say. Do you remember what the Master promised ? ‘Because thou hast been faithful over few things, I will make thee ruler over many things.’ That was the joy and that was the reward ; not singing praises in a heaven of idleness, but carrying on in an unbroken service all

the capacity that earth had shaped. Nothing that we have fought for will be lost. Nothing that we have striven for ignored. Every battle we have fought in secret will make the life beyond a grander thing. Every task that we have quietly done, when there were none to see and none to praise, will give us a heaven which is a sweeter place, and a service nearer the feet of the eternal. Brethren, I know not how it be with you ; but I know certainly how it is with me. No other thought of the beyond appeals to me. No other thought inspires me as does that. And of this I am sure, if I am sure of anything, that that is what Christ meant by life eternal. God grant us faith in him that we may have it !

THE GARDEN OF THE CHURCH

A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse.—Song of Solomon
iv. 12.

ONE of the pleasant features of our modern life is the increasing love which is betrayed towards gardens. Our garden literature is richer in these days than probably it has ever been before. There was a time, not so long ago, when the only gardening books were of a practical kind. They taught the science of gardening, and the art of it, and the proper arrangement of the garden-ground. But now we have a library of delightful books dealing with the poetry and charm of the garden, and that is a pleasant feature of our life. It may be that the appeal of the garden to this age of ours is the appeal of a secluded peace. To men who are restless and distracted there is in the garden something very restful. It may be also that there is some dim hope that the God who seems to have vanished from the creeds, may yet be

found somehow by the pure heart walking in the garden in the cool of the day. Do you remember how one of our poets puts that?

'A garden is a lovesome thing, God wot,
Rose plot,
Fringed pool,
Ferned grot.
The veriest school
Of peace, and yet the fool
Contends that God is not.
Not God? In gardens? When the eve is cool?
Nay, but I have a sign,
'Tis very sure God walks in mine.'

Now in our text from the Song of Solomon we have the church likened to a garden : 'A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse.' I make no apology for taking the text mystically, and applying it to the bride of Christ. I believe that we shall yet come back again to a mystical interpretation of the Song. Even already some of our finest scholars refuse to see in it just an impassioned love-lilt; they recognise that there is something deeper here.

First, then, in a garden we have order along with a sweet and beautiful variety.

In some of our old English homes, like that

one which is described by Charles Lamb so exquisitely, there lay, outside the garden wall, a tract of land which was called the wilderness. It was only a wilderness in this respect that it was left disordered and unkempt. It was a device, rooted in laws of contrast, to increase the pleasure which the garden gave. Men saw more vividly the garden's order, and its design, and the arrangement of it, when just beside it was this tangled thicket-land. Always, as contrasted with wild nature, this is the first mark of any garden. It is the scene of perfected arrangement; it is laid out with wisdom and with skill. And yet along with that and in the heart of it there is a wealth which even nature lacks. Along with that and in the heart of it what an infinite variety there is! Yon court where the slum-children play—there is order in it, but there is no variety. Yon yard, in which the prisoners exercise—it is designed, yet how monotonous! But this is the very genius of a garden that everywhere you have the stamp of order, yet everywhere an infinite variety that is a joy to the beholding eye. Here is every shade of colouring. Here is every variety of shape. Here are the sturdy children of the soil, and here

are those who have to cling and creep. And some lift themselves up into the sun, and take the light and heat as if they owned them, and others hide themselves away as if afraid.

Now does not that union of order and variety at once suggest to you the church of Christ? Think of the order of church-government—of all that the eldership has meant for Scotland. Think of the order of our public worship—not iron-bound but reverent and seemly. Think of the beautiful order of the sacrament, when the bread is broken and the wine is drunk—how simple it all is, yet how expressive. The Church of Christ is a designed place. It has its pattern shown it on the mount. It has its offices, its ordered polity, its hours and seasons, and its ritual. And then within all that, as in the garden where every kind of flower is blossoming, what a variety of life and of experience! The child is there, admitted in its baptism. The man is there in the midtime of his days. The aged saint is there upon whose face the light is falling from Immanuel's Land. There is the young man in his joy of strength, there the mother praying for her children, there the merchant with his large sagacity, and the quiet

dreamer of poetic dreams. Wherever to-day the Church of Christ is living, and is the bride of him who was the Son of Man, there is still room for all within her borders. Room for the savage from the heart of Africa, and for him who is cultured to his finger tips ; room for the rich from palaces of royalty, and for the poorest from the city slum. Every shade of experience is there, from the crudest fervour to the ripest sanctity. Every colour is there, from every country, bowing in loyalty at the feet of Christ.

Secondly, in a garden we have human service along with entire dependence upon God.

Every garden is the scene of labour. It reaches its beauty only through human toil. And it is there that the perfection of the garden differs from the perfection of wild nature. One of the finest descriptions of wild nature in all literature is the description of the Trossachs in Scott's *Lady of the Lake*. With what a delicate yet splendid touch does Scott describe the scene in all its tangled wealth. And yet no human hand was busy there, planting that eglantine or sowing that warrior oak. It became beautiful without the care of man. But in the garden there is human

service as truly as in the building of a house ; yet always, with that incessant toil, the sense of entire dependence upon God. You might build a temple though no dew should fall, and though all the weary summer should be rainless. You might build it though the storm came sweeping down, and the wild floods descended with the storm. But in a garden service is in vain, unless with service the unseen is working, giving the gentle rain in its due season, and the clear shining after hours of rain. It takes night and day to make the garden flourish. It takes the ministry of warmth and dew. Were these withheld then the most earnest toil would be barren as the sowing of the sand. So in a garden, more than in most scenes, we have the constant need of human service, and then the utter futility of service without the gracious ministry of heaven.

Now we all know how the Church of Christ has awakened wonderfully to the thought of service. Never, I take it, since the days of Pentecost has the church been labouring as she is doing now. With an enthusiasm that is very noble and with a patience that is very Christlike, wherever there is need or want or misery the

church to-day is going out to serve. At home in every slum of every city ; abroad in every country of the world, the church is among men as one who serveth. Never forget that when men decry the church. There is nothing like her service in the world. It is so freely given—it is so lowly—it is so hopeful when everything seems hopeless. But I would to God that we always realised that here again the church is as a garden, and that the finest service is but a futile thing without the attendant ministry of heaven. I tremble when men say to me ‘Yours is a splendidly organised congregation.’ We are so apt to rest on our organisation, as if in *that* there were one spark of power. Touched by the fire of the Holy Ghost, you cannot have enough organisation. Untouched by that, though it work perfectly, it is the mother and the nurse of death.

Thirdly, in a garden we have protection along with liberty.

Now a garden is always a protected place—a garden *inclosed* is my sister. A wall is built—a hedge is set around it—and wall and hedge are there just to protect it. You know the gardens in our old country-houses, and how you can dis-

tinguish them at once. Through the trees, looking from the highway, nothing is visible save the high brick wall. And yet you say at once *that* is the garden though not a flower or fruit-tree may be seen—it is the wall that tells you what it is. It is protected from the foot of cattle. It is protected from the hand of thief. It is protected from the blighting wind that would sweep down and make havoc of its wealth. Yet that protection—what is the end and aim of it? Is it repression? No, it is not repression. Its aim is that everything which grows within should have larger liberty to be itself. When you shut up prisoners within prison walls, you do not give them liberty, you take it from them. Deliberately, for the welfare of the state, you deprive them of their freedom for a season. But when you shut up flowers in a garden it is not to deprive them of their liberty. It is that, so protected and encompassed, they may be beautiful and may bear fruit. Destroy that wall, and in a week you may have havoc in the garden beds. Destroy that wall, and when the autumn comes you may look for fruit and look for it in vain. Here is restraint and yet it makes for freedom.

Here is protection with a view to liberty. Here in the garden is a strong defence that everything which grows may reach its best.

Well now, when you think of it, does not that again suggest the church? I question if we think enough of the protection of the Church of Christ. We recognise the protection of the home. We know what it means for childhood and for youth. Without it and all the discipline it brings, what a poor affair were human life! But never forget that God who in his mercy has given us the protection of the home, has given us too the protection of the church. It guards us in our infancy by baptism, and by all the keeping which baptism implies. It guards us by its congenial fellowship, and by its constant opportunities of service. It guards us by its recurring worship, nowhere more needed than in town and city where men are so apt to lose in crowded days the vision and the voice of God. You can do something to protect the church; but the church can do far more to protect you. Just as you needed the home when you were children, do you need the church till the last hour you live. And the joy of that tender guardianship is this, that it

checks nothing which is good and beautiful, but fosters everything that has been planted there, helping it to the glory of its growth.

Then, lastly, I would touch on this, that in a garden we have peace along with growth.

That a garden is a place of peace, I think we are all ready to admit. Is there any more peaceful spot than an old garden? *There* though the wind is blowing there is shelter. There the sun is warmer than without. The moment you have entered the old gate there is a sweet and soothing feeling of repose. And we see the flashing of a hundred wings, and hear the murmur of a thousand insects, and the roar of the world seems as a sound of dreams. If anywhere a man could forget self it would be in such a haunt of ancient peace. If anywhere a man could shut the world out it would be there within the garden wall. Yet all the time under that robe of peace what growth there is—how silent and unceasing! There is not a flower in all the garden but is pushing towards the bearing of the fruit. Peace and growth—these two are in the garden. Peace and growth—are these not in the church? Does not God call you here to be at rest, and to forget

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the jar and noise a little. And yet the church that can so rest the soul is not a garden in any sense for you, unless through worship and sacrament and preaching, silently and slowly you are growing. See to it, I beseech you, that you are not content with what you have attained. There is rest here, but you were better anywhere if you are only here to be lulled into sweet rest. You are here to learn. You are here to be ashamed. You are here to feel how much is still to do. God grant us in the sanctuary garden-peace, and in the sanctuary garden-growth.

THE JUDGEMENT OF THE SON

The Father hath committed all judgement unto the Son.—John v. 22.

WHEN we hear the word judgement on the lips of Christ we are prone to cast our thoughts into the future. Almost instinctively there rises on us some foreboding of the Day of Judgement. So powerfully has that last dread scene wrought on the imagination of mankind, that always when we light on the word judgement we seem to catch in the word a whisper of it ; until often, as it seems to me, we lose the primary meaning of the Scripture, and blind ourselves by a judgement that is future to one that is past or actually present. Now I want you to note the wording of our text. It is not the future tense that is employed here. It is not ‘The Father *will* commit’; it is ‘The Father hath committed now.’ That means that in the very hour he spake, Christ

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was invested with a judging power, and it is on that I desire now to speak.

Now the great impression made by the life of Christ is not an impression of judgement but of love. Here, we say, is a man of such compassion as never was witnessed on the earth before. There is a depth of tenderness about him that is infinitely attractive and endearing. There is a wealth of the most helpful sympathy—a passionate desire to be a friend. There is a tenderness that is unparalleled ; a sensibility to all distress ; a love so deep and strong and true that life was not sufficient to disclose it.

Yet in the heart of that appealing tenderness we soon awaken to another element. We come to see that wherever Jesus was, there was the element of judgement. As he moved along these ways of Galilee men and women knew that they were loved. With a like instinct, too deep for understanding, they knew continually that they were judged. The moment they stepped into that lowly presence—the moment they looked into his face and heard him speak, they felt they were standing at a judgement bar. It was not that they felt that they were

known. We may feel that we are known and not be judged. We may be perfectly conscious that some one knows our motives, and yet it may never cause the slightest self-reproach. But there was always self-reproach where Jesus was. Men were ashamed of themselves, they knew not why. His life was an unceasing act of love, and yet it was an unceasing act of judgement.

Sometimes it was his *words* that carried judgement, and carried it in quite a casual way. That is one office of the casual word, to reach the conscience and stir it unawares. None of us like to be directly judged. We are apt to resent the word of condemnation. To charge a man with such and such a fault is very often the way to steel his heart. But we all know how the casual word, said in our presence but never aimed at us, has a strange way of getting at the conscience. Have not you occasionally felt uneasy when the conversation took a certain turn? It was not meant for you, and yet it reached you; it found you out and made you feel your guilt. And what I say is that the talk of Christ had that strange power, in unequalled measure, of making men feel mysteri-

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ously guilty. Sometimes he hurled an open condemnation. Sometimes he cried ‘Woe unto you, ye Pharisees.’ But what I want you to feel is that it was not such that was the sorest condemnation of his lips. It was these words which he was always speaking, and which were never meant to wither and condemn, and yet which had that strange and awful power of wakening the agony of self-reproach.

Sometimes it was his *deeds* that carried judgement, and here again, in general, indirectly. Directly, he judged a barren fig-tree once; but it was not thus that his acts judged men and women. He did them not to judge men but to save them. They flowed from a heart that was the home of love. And yet when they fell upon the human conscience, they had a strange power of wakening self-reproach. ‘Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man.’ You remember how Simon Peter once cried that? And what had happened to make him cry that cry? Had Christ condemned him with a tongue of fire? It was not that which caused the bitter cry. It was the net that was so full of fishes. It was an act so wonderful

and kindly that Peter saw, and seeing loathed himself. Have we not all experienced that judgement—the silent judgement of some noble act? Nothing was said, but something fine was done, and seeing it so done, we were ashamed. And I say again that in the acts of Jesus, all of them acts of love and acts of grace, there lay the power, in unequalled measure, of touching men with a strange self-reproach.

Sometimes it was his *looks* that carried judgement, and looks are often powerful to do that. There are looks that are the cause of keener pain than any scolding of an angry lip. It does not take deeds to make us feel ashamed. It does not take words to make us feel ashamed. A look will do it, and will wake remorse, and make us hate ourselves for being vile. And if in human eyes where sin has lodged there be this power of waking self-reproach, how awful must it have been in eyes like Christ's. I do not wonder that the rich young ruler was sorrowful, when I read that Christ had looked on him and loved him. I do not wonder that the crowd was stricken when Jesus looked round about on them with anger. I do not wonder that when

Jesus turned and looked on Simon Peter in the hall, the heart of Peter was broken with the look, and he went out into the night and wept. Will any one say that was a look of anger? My brother and sister, it was a look of love. And the past was in it, and all its tender memories, and the dear dead days that were beyond recall. And it saved Peter when the night was past to think that the Lord had turned and looked at him; but first down to the very depths it judged him. No wild rebuke would ever have done that. It would have hardened him, and made him reprobate. No word of Sinai, given in flame and thunder, would ever have carried conviction to that heart. One look of Christ did more than all the decalogue. One look of Christ outmatched a thousand threatenings. One look of Christ showed in what height and depth the Father had given all judgement to the Son.

But even that is not all the truth. There was something more than word and deed and look. It was not only by what he did that Jesus judged; it was more by what he *was* than what he did. Is there any one of us in church to-night who

has not known how character can judge? Is there not somebody you know and love, who silently condemns you when you think of him? It is not that he is wanting to condemn you; nothing may be farther from his thoughts—and yet when you meet him, and when you see what *he* is, you are ashamed of all that *you* have been. That, I take it, is what the gospel means, when it tells us that the saints shall judge the world. There is not a saint, and not an earnest soul, but unconsciously is judging every day. And men may mock at him, and scorn him, and call him an idle dreamer or a visionary, and yet who knows what self-reproach is stirring before that character of love and beauty? Now from all such earthly characters lift your thought to the character of Christ. Think how complete it was, how beautiful, how perfect in its finest and its strongest. Then tell me if you have ever realised how men must have felt, and felt as in a flash, when on the highway or in the summer field they found themselves in the presence of the Lord? They were ashamed, and knew not what it meant. They were convicted, yet not a word was spoken. Away deep down new thoughts began to burn of

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what their life might be and ought to be. It was the unconscious influence of character ; the only perfect life the world had known. It was the witness, although they knew it not, that the Father had given all judgement to the Son.

Now I pass on to a second thought : what were some of the qualities of this judgement ? I have only time to touch on three to-night, and the first is that it was *unerring*. It is notable that when men judged Christ, their judgement was very generally wrong. He was Elias, they said, or Jeremias, or he was the friend of Beelzebub, or he was mad. But if their judgement upon him was often wrong, his judgement upon them was always right. There are men whose judgement is wonderfully sure so long as it moves within a certain area. A born teacher can always judge a boy, and a born detective can always judge a criminal. But the wonderful thing about our Saviour's judgement is that it was a universal judgement—the Father committed *all* judgement to the Son. Born in a village, he met the men of cities ; cradled in poverty, he met the rich. Unlearned, the men of learning moved around him ; a man of peace, there came to him

centurions. And yet in all that many-coloured throng which defiled for ever past his judgement bar, I never find that Jesus was deceived. ‘Thou art a rock,’ he said to Simon once, and Simon when he spoke was like the sand. And I can picture how the hearers smiled, and said ‘It is evident he does not know him.’ And then the years went by, and with resistless hand dragged to the light all that was deepest in him, till in the end of the day Jesus was proven right. Did you ever think of timid Nicodemus, stealing to him under the cloak of night? Was not that just the man to be distrusted—the last man in the world to tell a secret to? Yet Christ unlocked to him his richest treasury, detecting in an instant what he was—and Nicodemus embalmed him when he died. Never forget, my brother and my sister, that the judgement of Christ is an unerring judgement. You may be wrong in what you think of him. He is never wrong in what he thinks of you. Might it not be well, then, that to-night you should take that life of yours, of which you are so ignorant, and quietly yield it up unto the gaze of him whose eyes are as a flame of fire?

In the second place, it was a *surprising* judge-

ment. It was full of the element of unexpectedness. It ran right counter in a hundred cases to the accepted judgement of the world. One has described the writer Amiel as the master of the unexpected. But the master of the unexpected is not Amiel ; the master of the unexpected is Christ. He was always surprising men by what he did. He was always surprising them by what he would not do. But above all else I think that he surprised them just by the kind of judgements that he passed. Think of the judgesmen the passed upon the lilies—‘not even Solomon in all his glory.’ Have you any conception how the Jews were startled who first heard an audacity like that? Think of his judgement upon the little children, whom even his disciples would have kept from him : ‘except ye become as little children’—and they were beneath the notice of the Pharisee. He wanted an army that might win the world, and he judged that fishermen would be the men to form it. He wanted a woman who would kneel and worship, and he judged that a harlot might be the right material. My brother, if you have ever studied Scripture, and tried to get into living touch with

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Christ, you must have been thrilled, as I have so often been, with the arresting presence of surprise. Now remember that on the Day of Judgement that element is to have a conspicuous place. 'Lord, when saw we thee naked or in prison' —we are to be amazed that we are welcomed. And I mention this that you may learn that when the great white throne is set, and Christ is there, he will be the very same in action as when he walked upon the ways of Galilee.

Then in the third place, it was an *unceasing* judgement. It was in action every hour he lived. The judgement of character is always that, just because character is always character. Our legal judges are not always judges. They have their seasons when they sit in judgement. And then they lay aside their robes of office, and they go back to private life again. But in Christ the robe of office was *himself*, never to be laid aside in life or death, and that means his judgement is unceasing. You feel it when he wrought and when he spoke. You feel it when he went alone to pray. Men were convicted when they knew he prayed, and they came and cried to him 'Teach us to pray.' Right from the baptism

on to the cross of Calvary ; right from that hour on to this hour to-night, Christ has been judging men and judging women, and judging everything man's hands have wrought. You say you do not believe in the Last Judgement. But have you ever thought what that word *last* implies ? It is not a spectacle, that day of judgement, suddenly breaking on an astonished crowd. It is the *last*, and if you want the *first*, go back to Galilee and look at history. As a reasonable man you cannot deny the first ; is it quite reasonable to deny the last ? The last page of a book is meaningless save through the pages that have gone before. The last note in a piece of music is nothing save through the music that precedes. And even the Last Judgement would be meaningless if it were isolated and apart : it is the close of what has gone before. My brother, born in an age like this, when everybody seems to be judging Christ, will you remember there is the other side ? Will you remember he is judging you ? Go out to-night and meditate on that. Go out and think what must his judgement be. You will say nothing about the music or the sermon then : you will say, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'

THE RELIGIOUS USE OF HOLIDAYS¹

Return unto thy rest, O my soul.—Psalm cxvi. 7.

WRITING ‘To an ardent friend who took no rest,’ Hamerton, in his *Intellectual Life*, indicates in his own interesting way a flaw in his friend’s armour. ‘You have learned many things, my friend,’ he says, ‘but one thing you have *not* learned—the art of resting.’ And then, drawing on his own experience, he adds: ‘Once in the ardour of youth there shone before me a golden star in heaven, and on the deep azure around it, “Without haste, Without rest,” in letters of steady flame; but now I see more frequently a plain little stone set up in the earth, with the inscription, “Rest, and be thankful.”’

Now one has only to walk abroad with open eyes, in the summer season of vacation, to find

¹ This address appeared in the *Sunday at Home* for August 1912, and it is through the courtesy of the editor that I am able to give it a place here.

how many people, otherwise well educated, seem never to have learned that art of resting. It might appear the easiest thing imaginable to conduct our times of leisure profitably. To use to the full our periods of rest does not strike one as a difficult affair. And yet, if we watch people on vacation, especially if the vacation be prolonged, it will dawn on us that the management of leisure is not quite so easy as it seems. There are men who can manage a great business admirably, who cannot manage at all a little holiday. They are ill at ease, and find the hours interminable, and secretly wish they were at work again. And so they lose, and are conscious that they lose, one of the sweetest ministries of God for carrying us, with hope and energy, through the dead days of coming winter.

Nor was there ever a time in the history of the race when holidays were more needed than they are to-day, and that not because our work is so exacting, but because now it is so specialised. 'Many a man goes through some intellectual process for the greater part of his working hours,' says Sir Arthur Helps in his *Friends in Council*, 'which corresponds to the making of a pin's

head.' It is one of the conditions of his livelihood that he shall concentrate, and concentrate intensely. And it is this increasing and unavoidable contraction, more even than our modern strenuousness, that makes the claim of the holiday imperative. For routine, with all its blessings, has also its subtle and peculiar perils. It is difficult to feel how big the world is, if we are daily occupied with that pin's head. We shall never accomplish aught, and never learn aught, without the setting of the sternest limits; yet life is not what it was meant to be, if we lose the forest for the trees.

Now it is just there that holidays come in, as one of the gentle ministries of God. They are meant to give us back that sense of *wholeness* which is dulled in the narrowing of common toil. For a little while we leave our avocations. We lift up our eyes from the pin's head. We are no longer preachers or teachers merely, or clerks or gardeners or business men. We are merged as it were into a common life; we mingle, as Byron has it, with the universe; we feel, and we are meant to feel, the touch of nature that makes the whole world kin. That is why, as Dr. Dale

reminds us, holiday-makers are usually companionable. A tourist-ticket, as he quaintly puts it, seems never to be issued to ill-tempered people. And the reason of that is not just the excitement which is born of the variety of travel; it is also the glad consciousness of sharing in the great tide of universal life. Dr. Macmillan narrates how, in Damascus, he saw a workman making an amber necklace. He wrought at each separate bead but for a moment; then laying one aside, picked up another. And he wrought thus because these amber beads are so charged with electricity by friction, that they would fly into a hundred pieces without rest. It is this centrifugal tendency of modern times that is counteracted by the rest of holidays. We lift our eyes, and the world is a big world. We lay our task down, and begin to see. The little rivulets that fought their way, each through its own runnel on the moor, are merged, not without God's permission, into the larger flowing of the river.

‘Ah, once more,’ I cried, ‘ye stars, ye waters,
On my heart your mighty charm renew,
Still, still let me as I gaze upon you,
Feel my soul becoming vast like you.’

This sense of wholeness which is the boon of holidays is not generally won by conscious effort. It is far oftener won by practising the quiet grace of kindly receptivity. There is a sentence in one of Benjamin Jowett's letters to Miss Elliott, which many people might do well to lay to heart. 'I hope that you and your sister enjoy Rome,' he says, 'and don't try to improve yourselves more than is absolutely necessary.' There is a whole philosophy of holidays in that—a philosophy that is greatly needed now, when men are so apt to import into vacation the strenuousness of their working-days. It was a shrewd if somewhat dangerous remark of Tillier, *Le temps le mieux employé est celui que l'on perd*—the best-employed time is that which one loses. What he meant to teach was how many of the *best* things come to us without our seeking. That is true in every sphere of life, and every earnest worker knows its truth, but of holidays it is pre-eminently true. It is a great thing to improve ourselves; it is also a great thing to let God improve us. It is a noble virtue to be active; it is no less shining a virtue to be passive. Effort is noble, and it is divine, but he has made a tragical

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mistake who thinks that the universe will yield its best to the life which is nothing else than effort. ‘They that *wait* upon the Lord renew their strength.’ We need passivity for strength, as well as action. We need a heart that is open and responsive to the inflow of a thousand mystic influences. And so our holidays would do far more for us, if sometimes we did in them a little less, and simply ‘opened the windows towards Jerusalem,’ which in the city and in winter days were closed.

‘One moment now may give us more
Than years of toiling reason,
Our minds shall drink at every pore
The spirit of the season.’

Let me say in passing that there is one great gain in coming to view our holidays aright. It is that we learn to take them heartily, and without any trace of a bad conscience. ‘They took their pleasures sadly,’ says Froissart, and there are many people who take their pleasures sadly. They speak of them apologetically, and are glad to plead extenuating circumstances. They have the lurking thought that however sweet it be to get away to the sunshine for a little, it might be

nobler, possibly more Christlike, to stay where the dull work is being done. Now of course, if a man has scamped his work, he will always have a bad conscience for a holiday. If he has trifled where he should have toiled—shun him as companion in vacation. But if the work, however sore its failure, has been carried through in a stern and honest way, then, in the recurring call to rest, a man should recognise the call of God. When Israel was journeying in the wilderness, we read that the cloud went on before them. But that same cloud, bright with the fire of God, was also the signal which appointed rest. It spread itself out over the tabernacle, and hung motionless above the camp, and gave the divine summons to be still as clearly as the signal to arise. Israel was not only led by God; Israel was also rested by God. Their waiting hours were sanctioned and determined by him who regulated their marching hours. And the children played, and the men took their leisure, and the women sat and sung by the tent door, under as rich a sense of the divine as when they bowed to the labours of their pilgrimage. There was no room in them for an uneasy conscience, and there

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ought to be no room in us. It is not the voice of selfishness that says ‘Come ye yourselves apart, and rest awhile.’ It is the voice of One who knows our frame—who recognises the need that we be passive—who has taught us (long before Wordsworth did) that there is wisdom for the receptive heart.

‘These glad, these great, these goodly days,
Bewildering hope, outrunning praise,
The earth, renewed by the great sun’s longing,
Utters her joy in a million ways.

‘What is there left, sweet soul and true—
What, for us and our dream to do ?
What but to take this mighty Summer
As it were made for me and you ?’

But holidays have not alone a personal aspect; they likewise have a social aspect, and no man who ignores or forgets this can use them fully in a religious way. In a fine essay in *Puritan and Anglican* Professor Dowden says a striking thing of Milton. ‘The art of creating happiness,’ he says, ‘the most beautiful and most difficult of the fine arts, Milton had not studied.’ Well, perhaps few of us have studied it with the intensity and patience it deserves, but unquestionably we get

our opportunity in the sweet leisure of the summer holiday. If the fine art of giving happiness depended on the rendering of *great* services, then possibly it might ill consort with the easier temper of vacation. But we come to discover, as the years slip on, that we make others happy not by heroisms, but by the lesser ministries of loving kindness which severally may be insignificant. Now it is just here that the leisure of the holiday enriches us with priceless opportunity. At work, we are so engrossed in our own battle that the chance of little kindnesses escapes us. But when for a season we lay our work aside, and breathe freely, and cast our eyes abroad, then we begin to see what we were blind to. In little ways, chiefly of remembrance, we can all do something to make others happy. We can send the joy of the heather into homes where there is never any brown paper on the windows. And the truth is, if we do *not* do that, and it can be done in fifty different ways, we have missed the Christian spirit of the holiday. Not only so, but we have missed our certainty of having what they call a 'real good time.' For happiness is an elusive goddess, and has a trick of baffling her votary.

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She is found of those who seek her not—of those whose hearts are on a nobler quest—of those who have been led, by One who loves them, into a living sympathy with others.

I have among my friends a lady who used to feel that her holidays were a failure. She has told me she almost dreaded their approach, though she had everything that wealth could give. She was a mistress in the art of self-tormenting, and the holidays gave her ample room for that. She had a genius for feeling lonely, and her summer was the heyday of that feeling. No one, who knew her intimately, would have dreamed of calling her a selfish woman, and yet she always spent a selfish holiday. Then there passed a change upon her life, and she began to think of others in her rest. And she sent them flowers from the garden, which very prettily she called Lent lilies. And now and again she had folk staying with her whom she would never meet at dances in the winter—and that she has continued to this day. I can vouch for the mighty difference it has made. She has quite ceased to be a genius now. She is as happy in the summer weather as her madcap young brother home from Rugby. For her

there is a new delight in leisure, and a new and glad expansion of the heart, since she has learned at least the rudiments of the most difficult of the fine arts.

Yet that does not by any means exhaust the social claims of our vacation. There is demanded of us, too, a kindly thoughtfulness for those among whom we make our dwelling. There is no such champion of spiritual liberty as the great apostle to the Gentiles. With the eloquence of passion and of power he argues for our liberties in Christ. And yet it is this same apostle who, with not less intensity of feeling, pleads for the swift limiting of liberty in the highest interest of our brother. ‘All things are lawful to me, but all are not expedient.’ We need to be reminded of that constantly. It is along such lines, right through the year, that the Christian will seek to regulate his life. But there is no time when a man needs it more than when for a season he changes his environment, and makes his summer home among a people of an upbringing alien from his own. It is a shame to sojourn in the Highlands and to defy the Highland keeping of the Sabbath. It causes unknown pain to godly people, and sows

the seeds of many a church problem. Common courtesy would call for other conduct, but, when a man confesses Christ as Lord, he has more powerful arguments than courtesy to constrain him to a limiting of liberty. Sometimes such defiance is deliberate ; far oftener it is born of thoughtlessness. ‘Evil is wrought by want of thought, as well as want of heart.’ I should never call a holiday well spent, however exhilarating its delights, that leaves behind it an unkindly memory in the sheiling and the cottage of the glen.

In closing let us turn again to the great gospel instance of the holiday. ‘Come ye yourselves apart and rest awhile,’ said Jesus to his wearied followers. He did not say to them, ‘*Go* ye apart.’ He did not propose that he should stay behind. He knew, far better than any of them did, where there were shadowy and restful places. He had been with them in the thick of things, and amid the crowding of the village street, and now he was to be with them in their holiday. Do you think that any of them chafed at that? Were any just a trifle disappointed? Did they feel that to have Christ among the hills would mean a galling restriction of their liberty? If

there is one thing I am certain of, from all I ever learned of these disciples, it is that such a thought never crossed their minds. On the contrary, for every one of them the holiday would have been a failure without Christ. They knew that he, the prince of workers, would be the prince of holiday companions. And every hour of leisure was twice blessed, and every lily of the field more beautiful, and every brooklet had a sweeter music, because the Master whom they loved was there. They would have made a pitiful mistake had they gone on holiday without their Lord. Are there not people who attempt that still? And is it not *always* a mistake? To leave him out just at the very time when our ambition is to be *ourselves*, seems to me unspeakably foolish. For we are only our true selves when he is with us. It takes his hand to draw the music out. When he is forgotten, sin has its opportunity, and sin has a way of spoiling all the sunshine. If, as Henley says, we are to take this summer 'as it were made for me and you,' then we must deeply feel through all its glory that we are Christ's, and Christ is God's. Ruskin has taught us how great and noble memories in-

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tensify the beauty of the world. Mountains are grander, and valleys are more sweet, when by such memories they have been consecrated. And so, when we return to our dull task, there will be added joy in all that we have seen, if all is touched with memories of him who loved us and gave himself for us.

THE WINSOMENESS OF JESUS

And all . . . wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.—Luke iv. 22.

OUR text tells us that the words of Christ were gracious words, and in every sense of the word gracious that is true. But the exact meaning of the terms which are here used is a little different from what we commonly imagine. His hearers were not referring to Christ's message; they were referring rather to Christ's manner. They marvelled, not at the grace *of* which he spake; they marvelled at the grace *with* which he spake. In other words, what so arrested them as they gathered round and listened to the Master was what I would call the winsomeness of Jesus. It is on that theme I wish to dwell this evening. I desire to speak on the winsomeness of Christ. I shall try to unveil to you a little of that charm which was so characteristic of

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the Lord. And I shall do so in the one hope—to use the prophetic words of the old psalmist—that we may behold the beauty of the Lord.

You will note that this winsomeness of Jesus was not by any means confined to his discourse. It was in his speech that men felt the spell most powerfully, but it radiated out from his whole life. From the moment when he was baptized, on to the last agony on Calvary—at the marriage feast—at the table of Zacchæus—out in the meadows where the lilies were—everywhere, in every different circumstance, men felt not only the holiness of Jesus ; they were arrested also by his winsomeness. It was indeed this very winsomeness that was a stumbling-block to godly Jews. It was so different from all that they had read of in the men whom God had sent to be his messengers. Had Christ been stern, and lived a rugged life, and dwelt apart in fellowship with heaven, they would have been swifter to recognise his claims. It was in such guise the ancient prophets lived. It was in such guise that John the Baptist lived. He was a rugged man of fiery speech, and he fared coarsely, and loved to be alone. And then came Jesus moving with de-

light among the homes and haunts of common people, and what I say is that this very winsomeness was a perpetual riddle to the Jews. They could not understand his childlike interest in every flower that made the meadow beautiful. They could not understand his love for children nor his quiet happiness in common life. Reverencing the old prophetic character as that of the true messenger from God, they were baffled by the winsomeness of Jesus.

Now if you wish to feel the wonder of that winsomeness there are one or two considerations which are helpful. You have to think of it, for instance, in connection with the stupendous claims which Jesus made. One of the commonest features of the winsome character is a certain delightful and engaging diffidence. It is extremely rare to discover charm in anybody who seems a stranger to the grace of modesty. And though of course not for a single instant would I suggest that Christ was such a stranger, yet the fact remains that there never lived a man who made such amazing and stupendous claims. 'I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life.' 'No man cometh unto the Father but by me.'

Tell me, was there ever heard from human lips such amazing and unbounded self-assertion? And the wonderful thing is that with a note like that ringing like a trumpet through the ministry, men should still have felt that Christ was winsome. The fact is that unless Christ had lived men would have called his character impossible. So to assert, yet all the while to charm, is almost beyond credence psychologically. And it is just this glorious self-assertion sounding through the ministry of Christ that makes his winsomeness to thinking men such a baffling and amazing thing.

Again the wonder of Christ's winsomeness is deepened when we remember his loyalty to truth. Christ did not say, 'I speak the truth'; he said, '*I am* the truth.' Now it is one of the sad things about the winsome character that it is not the most truthful character. There is often more of truth in the blunt man than there is in the charming and attractive man. The former takes a sturdy pride in telling out exactly what he thinks; the latter, by his very temperament, is in peril of prophesying smooth things. When truth is unpleasant, the winsome character is continually

under temptation to conceal it. There may still be a compliment upon the lip, although there is a curse within the heart. And that is why men are generally readier to trust one who is bold and blunt and rugged than one whose distinguishing attribute is charm. They have a lurking conviction that the winsome man, for all his winsomeness, is not quite sincere. They question if he be really genuine when in every society he is so delightful. And this is the wonder of Christ's winsomeness, *not* that men felt it and acknowledged it, but that they felt it in One who stirred them to the deeps by his passionate loyalty to truth. 'I am the truth,' said Jesus Christ; and he lived that out to the last syllable. Not by a hairbreadth did he ever swerve from all that had been given him from heaven. And the strange thing is that, with such sublime fidelity to himself and his brother and his God, he should yet have been so infinitely winsome. 'We beheld his glory,' says the Apostle John, 'and it was full of grace and truth.' That was the wonder of it in apostolic eyes, and that has been the wonder of the ages. There are men who are splendidly truthful and not gracious. There are men who

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are finely gracious and not truthful. This was the wonder of the Son of God, that he was full of grace *and* truth.

The wonder of that winsomeness is deepened also by the experiences of Christ's life on earth. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and men hid as it were their faces from him. Had he always lived among the hills at Nazareth we might more easily have understood his charm. Dreaming his dreams there, where the world was beautiful, we might have expected a character of beauty. But Christ deliberately left that quietude, and flung himself into the battle of humanity, and it is when we think how awful was that battle that we marvel to find him winsome still. If ever there was a life to make one stern, it was the life that Jesus had to live. It was so hard, so misinterpreted, so ringed about with diabolic malice. Yet spite of every lip that taunted him, and every heart that hungered for his tripping, Christ never lost, whether in word or deed, the winsomeness that so attracted men. To be suspected as Jesus was suspected is not the common road to charm of character. It is not often that life blossoms out in an atmosphere of

suspicion and of treachery. Yet every day Christ rose *there* were the Pharisees, and there was Judas with his eyes of malice, and men said, 'He is mad ; he hath a devil'—and Jesus through it all was winsome still. Still had he eyes for the lilies of the field. Still was he happy in the home at Bethany. Still was he in love with little children, and happy-hearted and pitiful and courteous. It is this contrast between the outward lot and the infinite and inward grace of the Redeemer that makes so wonderful to thinking men what I call the winsomeness of Christ.

Observe too, that to the very end Christ never lost that moral beauty. It did not pass away as the dew passes, under the burning heat of the high sun. I know few things in life more saddening than to meet again some comrade of our youth, and to discover how the years have marred the likeness which we cherished in our memory. As we remember him, in school or college, he was one of the most delightful of companions. There was a charm in him, a happy winsomeness, that made him a universal favourite. And now after the lapse of years we meet him again, it may be unexpectedly, and we discover, in an afternoon,

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that the years have robbed him of his best. He is no longer the happy-hearted comrade whom we remember in the golden days. He is irritable or heavy-hearted now, or he is worldly and cynical and bitter. Everybody called him winsome long ago; nobody could call him winsome now. He has gone out to his battle with the world, and the grim world has beaten him. My brother, Jesus Christ entered that battle, and for him the struggle was terrific. And it grew fiercer every year he lived, till the last hour of agony and blood. And I shall tell you what convinces me that *he* came out victorious at the end : it is that on to the end he never lost the sweet and winsome beauty of the morning. No bitterness, even in the thick of it. No cynicism, even at the darkest. No cold suspicion of his brother-man, though he knew man as he was never known. No forfeiting of deep and happy peace ; no dimming of the mystic radiance, even when under the olives of Gethsemane the bloody sweat was dropping to the ground. With words of grace his ministry began, and there were words of grace upon the cross. With a deed of grace his ministry began, and there were deeds of grace in the resurrection

garden. I want you to feel as you have never felt before the magnificent persistence of Christ's winsomeness, that you may go home to-night and be ashamed at what the years have been plundering from you.

Now if you ask me what were the sources of this unequalled winsomeness of character, I think I should answer that they were chiefly two, and the first was the influence of home. We do not know much about the home in Nazareth—God in his wisdom has hung a veil on that—but we know enough from the gospels to assure us that it was a home of happiness and peace. Martin Luther could never think of home without a certain shuddering of heart. There was no gladness for him in his *Pater Noster*, so loveless were his memories of his father. But Jesus, all through his stormy years, turned to his home with infinite delight, and clothed his deepest thoughts of God and man in the tender and sweet memories of Nazareth. There had he seen the woman sweep the house. There had he watched the hands that used the leaven. There had he learned, with innocent childish lips, to run to the workshop and cry Abba Father. Out in the

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battle, with evil eyes upon him, his thought went flashing back to happy Nazareth, and at the darkest he never lost his winsomeness, because he never lost the influence of home. There are homes where it is well-nigh impossible that the children ever should be winsome. There is so much bitterness in them, so much worldliness, so much unkindly and unguarded talk. There is so little of that gracious reverence that ought to encircle the great years of childhood, when the foot of the angel is still upon the ladder, and every bush is burning with its God. Out of such homes may come successful men, or smart and clever and fashionable women ; but never, from such a barren childhood, is there built up the temper that is winsome. It takes a Mary to make a winsome son. It takes a home of reverence and of love. It takes a depth of fatherhood and motherhood that has never lost the hallowing of prayer. Men marvelled at the grace with which he spake, and they said, 'Is not this Joseph's son ?' That was their difficulty, and, as often happens, at the heart of the difficulty was the explanation. They would have marvelled less had they but known how quietly beautiful was that home in

Nazareth, where those lips which were to draw the world stammered the first syllables of speech.

But the winsomeness of Jesus had another source than the kindly influence of Nazareth. It was his knowledge of the Heavenly Father and his unbroken fellowship with him. It was Charles Kingsley, was it not, who as he lay dying was heard murmuring 'How beautiful God is!' His heart was quieted in the dark valley by his vision of the beauty of the Lord. And no one, I think, can read the gospel story and learn what Jesus saw of the divine, without echoing the words of Kingsley, and murmuring, 'How beautiful is God.' One would not call the God of Sinai beautiful; one would call the God of Sinai glorious. He dwelt in the light that no man could approach, and he was infinite in holiness and majesty. But the God of Jesus is something more than that, as every page of the four gospels shows us. He is not only infinitely holy, he is also infinitely winsome. He does not dwell apart in awful majesty; it is he who clothes the lilies of the field. His care is not limited to mighty empires; it is he who caters for the sparrow. And he makes the rain to fall on the evil and

the good, and when we ask for bread he will not give a stone, and he has a ring and a robe and a sweet kiss of welcome for the poor battered son from the far country. Aristotle pictured an ideal man, and one of his marks was *that he should never run*. But the father, when he saw the prodigal far off, *ran* and fell upon his neck and kissed him. My brother, do you not feel the charm in that—the charm that has wooed and won through all the ages? There is more than authority in such a God ; there is the grace of winsomeness as well. Christ felt, as man had never felt, the unsurpassable winsomeness of God. To that he clung with a faith which never faltered, in the teeth of everything that contradicted it. And I think it was that winsomeness of God, learned in the intimacy of a perfect sonship, that was one secret and unfailing spring of the winsomeness of our Redeemer. If God be holy, and nothing else than holy, those who trust in him will not be winsome. His righteousness may make them righteous, but ‘scarcely for a righteous man will one die.’ It takes a God of love to make men lovable ; a God of perfect grace to make them gracious. God in his infinite glory must

be winning if men who know his name are to be winsome. It was that discovery which Jesus made. He walked in sonship with a winning God. All that he had ever seen at home was reinforced by what he saw in heaven. Until at last, reflecting as a mirror the sweet and kindly fatherhood of God, he lived in a winsomeness the world could never give, and at its dreariest could not take away. My brother, we cannot hope to repeat that. It is too high and wonderful for us. But at least we can pray, as the psalmist prayed of old, 'Let the beauty of the Lord be upon us.' And so it may be that as the days go by, not without many a pitiable failure, we too may come to show a little of the winsomeness of our Master and our Lord.

SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR

Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.—Mark xii. 34.

THERE are two things which it is very difficult for the uninstructed eye to gauge, the one is the dimensions of a crowd, and the other is the measurement of distance. So much depends on the clearness of the air, and so much on the intervening landscape, that the most accurate observer may find himself at fault when estimating distances in unfamiliar places.

Now as it is in the material world, so is it in the spiritual world. There is nothing harder than to gauge with accuracy how near a man may be to the kingdom of God. I believe there are many whom we think very near it who as a matter of fact are far away. I believe there are many who seem to us far away who in the sight of God are very near. And as this should make every one of us more earnest, for some may be farther

from God than we imagine, so should it make every one of us more hopeful, for some may be nearer Christ than we conceive. We are often in error in such measurements, and therefore in charity we should avoid them. But of this be sure, that Christ was never in error, never miscalculated in these finer judgments ; and here we have him saying of a scribe, ‘Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.’ I want then this evening, with your attention, to examine this deeply interesting case. I shall give you some signs that the scribe was near the kingdom. And I do pray that the spirit of Jesus Christ may bring the word right home into your hearts, that one here and another there may say, ‘Lord is it I, and is it I?’

Let us note then some of the signs that this scribe was not far from the kingdom of God. And in the first place, and in a general sense, this is true as a plain fact of history. This scribe was a Jew, trained in the Jewish faith, familiar with the doctrine of the kingdom. He lived in Palestine, in the providence of God, at the very time when Jesus Christ was there. Often would he have seen him in the streets, often would he have listened to him talking, and no man could

be so near the king without being near the gateway of the kingdom. He was not an African, like Simon of Cyrene, with an ocean between his home and that of Jesus. He was not, like Lydia, a European, born in another continent from Christ. He lived within a stone's-throw of the Master ; he studied the very books the Master loved ; and doubtless among the followers of Jesus were some whom he would call his friends.

Now there are none of you here this evening of whom similar things might not be said. By birth and upbringing and Christian nurture, you are not far from the kingdom of God. It is near you whenever you hear the gospel. It is near you in every Christian character. The influences of that kingdom are around you ; its activities are incalculable in this city. In the providence of God you have been born here, where there is an open Bible and a Christian church—and it may have come even nearer you than that. You may have had a mother who was a saint of God, or a father who was an exemplary Christian ; you may have a sister within your home to-day whose religion you would never dream of doubting. And therefore remember,

however vile you be, however foolish or prayerless or unclean, if you want to return you have not far to travel ; you are not far from the kingdom of God.

Again this scribe was not far from the kingdom because he had a great admiration for the Lord. I think we can see, if we read the passage closely, how very warmly this man admired the Master. Probably he had listened to Christ before, and had been deeply stirred by what he heard. Dissatisfied with all his weary studies, there was that in Christ which made him dream of peace. But now, as he heard the discussion with the Sadducees, and saw Christ's masterly handling of these sceptics, all other feelings, dim and ill-defined, gave place to a great and glowing admiration. Had he been a little man his spite would have rejoiced to see his rivals the Sadducees confuted. Had he been a blind and bitter pedant of the schools, he would have been angry at any triumph of the Carpenter. But there was something noble in this scribe—something that lifted him above all petty feeling—he felt he was in the presence of a Master, and was filled with warm and lively admiration. Now whenever a man

feels that, I want to say he is not far from the kingdom. You are not a Christian when you admire Christ Jesus, but you are nearer his kingdom than when you jest and sneer. And if I speak to any young man this evening who can say from his heart he admires this man of Nazareth, I urge you, my brother, to take one other step, just because you are so near the gate. We are not saved by admiring Jesus Christ. We are saved by loving him and serving him. It takes something mightier than admiration to pierce to the very deeps of a man's being. But admiration is so akin to love, and is so truly its herald and its harbinger, that if you truly and morally admire Christ, you are not far from the kingdom. Not far, yet on the wrong side of the gate. That is the infinite pity of it all. 'O the little more and how much it is ; and the little less, and what worlds away.' And therefore I appeal to you who are so near, because you so admire the Son of Man, to take the last step of full surrender that you may have the blessings of the free.

Again this scribe was very near the kingdom because he was intellectually convinced that Christ was right. With perfect frankness, and with

full sincerity, he admitted that what Jesus said was truth. Nothing would have been easier for him than to challenge Jesus' answer to his question. It was a matter of endless debate among the scribes which was really the great commandment. And had he been seeking what so many seek in argument, not truth, but a dialectic triumph, he could easily have summoned his scholastic learning. But the scribe was not a disputer of this world ; he was a genuine searcher for the truth. Weary with all his study of the law, he longed for a ray of light upon his darkness. And when he welcomed the doctrine of the Christ, and said, 'Well, master, thou hast spoken truth,' Christ recognised what was implied in that, and said 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.' If he had flouted the answer of the Lord he would have been far away from the kingdom. If he had let the words sink down into his heart, that moment he would have been within it. But he gave them an intellectual acceptance—said 'Yes, master, what you say is true' ; and that, though it did not stamp as a citizen, was a mark that he was not far away.

Now I think that that very hopeful sign is one

which meets us everywhere to-day. There is a greater respect for the teaching of Christ now than there has been for many generations. Men want to know what Jesus Christ has said on every relationship and every problem. There is a widespread feeling that in these words of his lies the true answer to a thousand questions. And so within the past twenty years we have had countless books upon the teaching of Jesus, and attempts innumerable to bring his words to bear on all the problems of our modern life. There is much that is hopeful in that deepening of interest. It is not everything, but it is much. It takes more than the intellect to make a Christian, for faith is something deeper than the intellect. Still, when a man comes back to the words of Christ, after a trial of the words of other masters—when he says to himself, ‘There are no words like these, for none are proving themselves so true to me’—that man is not far from the kingdom of God.

And then, again, the scribe was near the kingdom because he was deeply stirred by Jesus’ answer. Emotionally as well as intellectually he was very deeply impressed by Jesus Christ. You

may often notice in the life of Jesus how deeply his hearers were *moved* by what he said. It was not cold truth they heard, but living, burning truth, and it profoundly moved them in sympathy or anger. So here there is emotional excitement ; had you been present you would have seen a kindling eye. There is more than intellectual assent here ; there is the stirring of a man's nature to its depths. It was a dangerous thing to acknowledge Jesus Christ, and the scribe would never have done it in cold blood. To admit in public thus that Christ was right was to expose himself to bitterest suspicion. And then the words that followed his confession are so torrent-like, and so intense, and so aglow, that you feel through them the excitement of the speaker, and realise how deeply he was moved. There is no sign that his *conscience* had been touched; there is every sign that his *feelings* had been touched. The crust of formalism had been broken through—he was no longer the cold and dry scholastic. And it was *then*, when he was so impressed—so ready for great action and decision—that Jesus looking at him said, ‘Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.’

Now you have all heard it long ago that it is not our feelings which save us, but our faith. It is not by what we feel that we are saved ; it is by laying our hand in that of Jesus Christ. It is the height of folly for one to trust his feelings when the Bible calls on him to trust his Saviour. It takes more than emotion, as it takes more than intellect, to enter the glad kingdom of the Lord. But what I want you to realise this evening is the value of our seasons of emotion in sweeping us forward to a great decision in a way that argument can rarely do. It may be that we come to church indifferent and a word is spoken which reaches to our hearts. It may be that a children's hymn is sung and its memories unlock the fount of tears. Or some one who is dear is called to suffer, or some one whom we love is called to die ; or we have been ill, and are still weak and helpless, and a simple prayer is offered by our bed. In some such ways, and there are a thousand ways, we are brought to hours when we are deeply moved. And the crust is broken, and the deeps are stirred, and we cease to be indifferent and worldly. And I plead with you to seize these hours, and to seal them at once in personal

decision, for in all your appointed journey through the world you are never so near the kingdom as just then. I care not how deeply your feelings may be moved ; I must tell you plainly that *they* will never save you. Could your tears for ever flow you might still be an exile from the grace of Christ. But when your tears *are* flowing, and your heart is tender, you are so near the kingdom of the Lord that the pity is infinite if after all you miss it. There are times when a single step makes all the difference, as when a man is standing on the quay. One step, and he is on board the ocean vessel that will carry him over the deeps to other countries. But let him refuse that step and stand inactive, and all the feeling of which the heart is capable will not prevent his return to the old life, there to be haunted by a dull regret. Is it such an hour with any one this evening ? Thou art not far, my brother, from the kingdom. It was never quite so near you in the past. It may never be quite so near you in the future. Take it by violence. Storm its walls to-night. Say, ‘I am thine, my Saviour, in a full surrender.’ What a difference that will make in time, and what a difference through all eternity !

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OUR DAILY BREAD

VIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF HARVEST

Give us this day our daily bread.—Matt. vi. 11.

ONCE more in the kindly providence of God we have reached the season of the harvest. The reaper has been busy in the fields, and sower and reaper have rejoiced together. Many a day in the past summer-season we wondered if the corn would ever ripen. There was such rain, so pitiless and ceaseless. There was such absence of sunshine and of warmth. Yet spite of everything harvest has arrived, and the fields have been heavy with their happy burden, and in the teeth of clenched antagonisms the promises of God have been fulfilled. Every harvest is a prophecy. It is the shadow of an inward mystery. It cries to us, as with a golden trumpet, ‘With *God* all things are possible.’

And so in days when all the world is dreary, and excellence seems farther off than ever, the wise man will pluck up heart again, as not despairing of his harvest-home. Well, now I want to take our text and set it in the light of harvest. I want to look upon our daily bread against the background of the harvest-field. A thing seems very different, does it not, according to the light in which you view it? Suppose then that in this light we look for a little at these familiar words.

First then in that light let us think of what the answer to this prayer involves.

Now when you read it unimaginatively, this seems an almost trifling petition. It almost looks like an intruder here, and men have often spoken of it so. On the one side of it there is the will of God, reaching out into the height of heaven. On the other side of it there are our sins, reaching down into unfathomed depths. And then, between these two infinities, spanning the distance from cherubim to Satan, there is '*Give us this day our daily bread.*' Our sin runs back to an uncharted past, but in this petition there is no thought of yesterday. The will of God shall be for evermore, but in this petition

there is no to-morrow. Give us this day our daily bread—supply us with a little food to-day—feed us till we go to rest to-night. As if some frail and tiny cockleshell should be sailing betwixt two mighty galleons, as if some hillock that a child could climb should be set down betwixt two mighty Alps, so seems this prayer for our daily bread betwixt the will of the eternal God, and the cry for pardon for our sins whose roots go down into the depths of hell.

But now suppose you take this prayer and set it in the light of harvest. Give us this day our daily bread—can you tell me what is involved when it is answered? Why, if you but realised it, and caught the infinite range of its relationships, never again would it be insignificant. For all the ministry of spring is in it, and all the warmth and glory of the summer. And night and day, and heat and cold, and frost, and all the falling of the rain. And light that has come from distances unthinkable, and breezes that have blown from far away, and powers of nourishment that for a million years have been preparing in the mother earth. Give us this day our daily bread. Is it a little thing to get a piece of bread?

Is it so little that it is out of place here where we are moving in the heights and depths? Not if you set it in the light of harvest, and think that not a crust can be bestowed unless the sun has shone, and the rain fallen, and the earth been quietly busy for millenniums.

I think then there is a lesson here about the greatness of the things we pray for. Our tiniest petitions might seem large, if we only knew what the answer would involve. There are things which you ask for which seem little things. They are peculiar and personal and private. They are not plainly vast like some petitions, as when we pray for the conversion of the world. Yet could you follow out that prayer of yours, that little private individual prayer, you might find it calling for the power of heaven as mightily as the conversion of the nations. ‘Thou art coming to a king, large petitions with thee bring.’ Only remember that a large petition is not always measured by the compass of it. It may be small and yet it may be large. It may be trifling and be tremendous, for all the dear dead days beyond recall may somehow be implicated in the answer. You are lonely, and you pray to God that he

would send a friend into your life. And then some day to you there comes that friend, perhaps in the most casual of meetings. Yet who shall tell the countless prearrangements, and the nice adjustment of a million orderings, before there was that footfall on the threshold which has made all the difference in the world to you? Give us this day our daily bread, and the sunshine and the storm are in the answer. Give us a friend, and perhaps there were no answer saving for omniscience and omnipotence. Now we know in part and see in part; but when we know even as we are known we shall discover all that was involved in the answer to our humblest prayers.

In the second place, in the light of harvest think of the toil that lies behind the gift.

There are some gifts which we shall always value because of the love which has suggested them. There are others which mean much to us because of the thoughtfulness which they reveal. But now and then a gift is given us which touches us in a peculiar way, because we recognise the toil it cost. It may be given us by a child perhaps, or it may be given us by some poor woman. And it is not beautiful, nor is

it costly, nor would it fetch a shilling in the market. And yet to us who know the story of it, and how the hands were busied in the making, it may be beautiful as any diadem. It was not purchased with an easy purse. The purses that I am thinking of are lean. It was not ordered from a foreign market. Love is not fond of trafficking in markets. In that small workshop where your boy is busy, in that small room where the poor sufferer lives, it was designed and fashioned and completed. Such gifts are often sorry to the eye. Such gifts are never sorry to the heart. Poor may they be and insignificant, yet never to us can they be insignificant. We know what they have cost, and knowing *that* we recognise an unsuspected value. We know the toil that is behind the gift.

I want you then to take that thought and to apply it to your daily bread. It is a gift, and yet behind that gift do you remember all the toil there is? I could understand a man despising manna, even though manna was the bread of angels. It came so easily, and was so lightly got, and was so lavishly and freely given. But daily bread is more divine than manna, for it like

manna is the gift of heaven, and yet we get it not till arms are weary and sweat has broken on the human brow. I think of the ploughman with his steaming horses driving his furrow in the heavy field. I think of the sower going forth to sow. I think of the stir and movement of the harvest. I think of the clanking of the threshing mill, and of the dusty grinding of the corn, and of all those who in our baking-houses are toiling in the night when we are sleeping. *Give us this day our daily bread*—then it is a gift, that daily bread. It comes to us from God, in his great bounty, and in his compassion for his hungry children. And yet it comes not through an opened heaven, but through the sweat and labour of humanity, through men and women who are often weary bearing the heat and burden of the day.

And is it not generally in such ways that our most precious gifts are given us? Every good and perfect gift is from above, yet is there something of heart-blood on them all. A noble painting is a precious gift. It is a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. Look at it, how calm and beautiful it is. There is not a trace of struggle

in its beauty. But had you lived in communion with the artist, and had you been with him when he was painting that, what strain and agony you would have seen! So is it with every noble poem; so with our civil and religious liberty. They are all gifts to us; they come from God; they are ours to cherish and enjoy. Yet every one of them is wet with tears, and chartered with human toil and pain, and oftentimes, like the Messiah's garment, dipped in the final ministry of blood. Into that fellowship of lofty gifts I want you, then, to put your daily bread. It is not little, nor is it insignificant when you remember all that lies behind it. And you do not wonder now to find it here betwixt the will of God and our transgression, though the one rises to the height of glory and the other tangles in the pit of hell.

Lastly, in the light of harvest think of the hands through which the gift is given. Give us this day our daily bread we pray, and then through certain hands it is bestowed. Whose hands? Are they the hands of God? 'No man hath seen God at any time.' Are they, then, the hands of the illustrious, or of those whose names

are famous in the world? All of you know as well as I do that it is not thus our bread is ministered ; it reaches us by the hands of lowly men. Out of his cottage does the reaper come, and back to his cottage does he go at evening. And we halt a moment, and we watch him toiling under the autumn sunshine in the field. But what his name is, or where he had his birth, or what are his hopes and what his tragedies, of that we know absolutely nothing. So was it with the sower in the spring. So is it with the harvester in autumn. They have no chronicle, nor any lustre, nor any greatness in the eyes of man. And what I want you to realise is this, that when God answers this universal prayer it is such hands as these that he employs. Once in Scotland we had a different story. Once we had a genius at the plough. And he saw visions there and he dreamed dreams until his field was as a lawn of paradise. But for that *one*, who has his crown of amaranth, are there not tens of thousands who are nameless, toiling, sorrowing, rejoicing, dying, and never raising a ripple on the sea ? Give us this day our daily bread—it is by such hands that the prayer is answered. It is by

these that the Almighty Father shows that he is hearkening to his children. It is his recognition of obscurity, and of lives that are uncheered by human voices, and of days that pass in silence and in shadow into the silence and shadow of the grave.

Now have you ever quietly thought of what we owe to ministries like that? One of the deepest debts we owe is to those who are sleeping in unregarded graves. It is not the rare flower which makes the meadow beautiful. It is the flower that blossoms by the thousand there. It is not the aurora which gives the sky its glory. It is the radiance of the common day. And so with life; perhaps we shall never know how it is beautified and raised and glorified by those who toil in undistinguished fashion. Such men may never write great poems, but it is they who make great poems possible. Such may never do heroic things, but they are the soil in which the seed is sown. Such men will not redeem the world. It takes the incarnate Son of God for that. But they—the peasants and the fishermen—will carry forth the music to humanity. Give us this day our daily bread. Are there not multitudes who are

praying so? And you, you have no genius, no gifts? You are an obscure and ordinary person? But if there is any meaning in our text, set in the light of sowing and of harvest, it is that the answer to that daily prayer will be vouchsafed through lowly folk like you.



ELECTIVE AFFINITY

And being let go, they went to their own company.—Acts iv. 23.

THE healing of the lame man at the Gate Beautiful of the Temple had stirred an intense excitement in Jerusalem. Like the church bell which summons folk to sermon, it had attracted a crowd to the disciples. And Peter, who never saw a crowd but he longed for the opportunity to preach to it, began to preach—there were about five thousand gathered—and many of his hearers were converted. The priests and the captain of the Temple and the Sadducees were very indignant at this powerful doctrine. They put an arrest on Peter and on John, and committed them to prison for the night ; and the next day they had them out, and examined them on their authority for this miracle. We know how bravely and nobly Peter answered : what a change from that night of denial before Calvary ! We know into what a

sorry pass the council came : they threatened Peter and John, and let them go. So by the narrative of facts we reach our text, ‘And being let go, they went to their own company.’

I wish, then, this evening to spiritualise our text, for it seems to me to be full of rich suggestion. It hints at facts which lie very near to us, and which are worthy of our observation. None of us are prisoners in a literal sense. We are not immured in the dark or damp of dungeons. The age of persecution, in its barbaric forms, has fled from our land of liberty for ever. But for all that there are shackles which still bind us, and we are under many constraints from day to day, and it is as true of us as of Peter and John that being let go, we go to our own company. Like the carrier-pigeon which, freed from its wicker, wheels for its bearings and then starts for home ; like the mountain burn which the little child may dam, but which when released goes hurrying to the sea—so all of us are subject to constraint, but being let go, we go to our own company. That is the thought on which I wish to dwell.

First, then, I think of the constraint of home. It is the earliest pressure which we know. In the

years when we are climbing towards maturity we are in the sweetest of all earth's imprisonments. We are engirdled by love then and by a father's ordering. We have to yield our wills up to another's will. It is not the child who chooses or decides ; it is the father and the mother who do that. But the day comes when a young man leaves home. Like Peter and John in our story, he is let go. He has to face the world now on his own resources, and the day of authority and of command is over. It is in such a time, when the restraints are gone which were the safety and the strength of home, that a man steadily goes to his own company. What were the thoughts that were smouldering and burning under the gentle but firm constraint of home ? What kind of life was being lived in secret under the quiet routine and through the family worship ? What sort of ideal was glimmering and forming, of which the mother knew absolutely nothing ? It is not their liberty that wrecks men—what we call wreck is often revelation—it is the kind of life which they have led in secret before the hour of liberty arrives. The bonds of authority are broken now. There is no will to consult but a man's own. So being let go,

with many a ‘God bless you,’ and hidden tears, and prayers to a father’s God, for all that is noblest or for all that is poorest men go to their own company.

You know the parable of the prodigal son by heart. Did you ever think of the story in this light? I am sure you would never have guessed how vile that youth was if you had seen him living with his father. But no man becomes a prodigal in one swift hour. If he went to the harlots he had been dreaming of them. There was not a hillside and there was not a field at home but could have told stories of his unclean heart. Then came the tales of his wild life abroad, and his brother said, ‘I could not have believed it.’ But in the sight of God the riot was revelation ; being let go, he went to his own company.

And you have often read of Jesus in the Temple. Did you ever think of *that* story in this light? Has it not been preserved for us out of these voiceless years because of its exquisite glimpse into that boyish heart? I doubt not that, as the companies turned homeward, other sons besides Jesus were missing from the crowd, and other

mothers besides Mary of Nazareth went back to Jerusalem to look for them. And one would find her son among the soldiers, and another would find her son in the bazaars ; Mary alone found *her* son in the Temple. As naturally as the sun-flower to the sun, the heart of Jesus turned to that holy place. There was nothing on earth of such concern to him as to ask and hear about eternal things. His mother thought that her dear son was lost, and she knew not where amid the crowds to find him ; but being let go, he had gone to his own company.

Again I think of the constraint of work. There was a little book published some time ago with the attractive title *Blessed be Drudgery*, and I think that most of us, as the years pass, learn gladly to subscribe to that beatitude. What moods and whimsies does our work save us from ! How it steadies us and how it guards us ! If it were not for that bondage of our toil, how intolerable some of us should be to live with ! I have known busy men who through the week would have scorned the very suggestion that they ailed, yet somehow they often ailed on Sundays. Of course there come seasons when such bondage

irritates. We have all known how it fretted in the summer-time. When the cloudless mornings come, and the shimmer of heat, and we hear the calling of field and loch and river, it is not easy then with a quiet heart to get to the study and the office-desk. But for all that, work is a wise constraint, and a happy circumscription of God's finger, and a narrowing of our way with such a hedge as will blossom into beauty by and by.

But being let go, we go to our own company. Every evening in a great city explains that. Men are imprisoned all day in the routine, but when the evening comes gravitate to their own. Here are three young fellows who work at the same desk. They are fellow-clerks in the same city office. You will find all of them at the desk during the day ; but the question is, where will you find them at night ? You will find one of them in the music-hall, that most uninspiring of all haunts. You will find one at home with his few prized books around him, superbly happy in his Shakespeare or his Stevenson. You will find one down in the mission-hall, enthusiastic over his Boys' Brigade. What is your company ? Where do you gravitate ? When you can follow

your own sweet will, whither away? Say to yourself when work is done to-morrow, 'Being let go, I go to my own company'—and then thank God for it, or be ashamed.

Once more, and touching on more delicate matters, I think of the constraint of our self-interest. I speak of the bondage which everybody knows, and which arises from our social system. No man is free, in an intricate society, to say and do exactly what he pleases. The most uncharitable people I ever met were the people who took a pride in being candid. I grant you that in the heroic nature the thought of self-interest has hardly any place. But I am not talking about heroes now, I am talking of the average man in the average Christian city. And what I say is that he is so interlocked in this great mechanism which we call society that something of the rough and vigorous and outspoken liberty which characterised our forefathers is gone. It is far more expensive for the average citizen to speak out his whole mind than to keep a carriage and pair. There are accommodations and compliances and silences that are well understood on every exchange and market. And one of the

hardest tasks for any man is to keep a clean conscience and an unsullied heart, while bowing to those restraints of self which society or wise self-interest demands.

But that bondage is not a perpetual bondage. All are released from it in various ways. If action be fettered, thought at least is free, nor is there any veil by the fireside at home. Or it may be that when a man has made his fortune he feels that at last he can dare to be himself, for he no longer depends for his advancement on the kindly offices of any brother. The question is what are you *then*? What judgements do you pass by the fireside? Are you less courteous and kindly now that you are *made*, than in the years when your career was making? Being let go from social entanglement, and from the grim and ceaseless pressure of self-interest, steadily and silently and surely men go like the apostles to their own.

Again I think of the constraint of evil habit. One of the most arresting of Christ's miracles is the curing of the Gadarene demoniac. In his isolation and in his lonely misery the man is a type of sin's separating power. He had been very happy

once in Gadara ; his wife had loved him, and so had his little children. He was well thought of in his little village, and the evenings were pleasant there when work was done. Then fell on him the curse that ruined him, wrecking his intellect and all his happiness, and driving him apart from those he loved until that hour when he was faced by Christ. In that great hour it was farewell to bondage. His fetters were broken and he was a man again. Fain would he have followed his deliverer, and shared the fortunes of his Galilean healer. But Jesus said to him, ‘Go home again. Thy wife has been praying for thee and thy children love thee.’ So being let go from the tyranny of sin, the poor demoniac went to his own company.

And that is always one of the plagues of sin. It separates a man from his own company. We may be under the same roof as our own company, and yet be a thousand miles away from them. There is a burst of temper, and then misunderstanding, and then the pride which will never ask forgiveness—and hearts, that were fashioned in eternity for one another, go drifting apart like ships upon the sea. Sin separates the father from

the son. Sin separates the mother from her child. From all that is ours by birthright of humanity we are barred out by the tyranny of evil. And then comes Christ and gives us spiritual freedom, rescuing us from the bondage of the years, and being let go we go to our own company. For the *best* is our true company and not the worst. We were made for goodness, we were not made for evil. It is love and tenderness and purity and light which are the true society of a God-created spirit. So when a man is released from sin's imprisonment by the word and present power of his Redeemer, being let go he hastens to his own.

Then lastly I think of the constraint of life, for there is a deep sense in which this life is bondage. We are the children of immortality and not of time, and here we are cribbed and cabined and confined. Nothing is perfect here, and nothing rounded. We are not built to the scale of three score years. There is no such thing as ultimate success here; the only success is not to give over striving. So are we fettered and hampered and imprisoned, and the bird is beating its wings against the bars; but when

death comes the spirit is set free, and being let go it travels to its own. Did you ever think of eternity like that? It is an arresting and an awful thought. It is far wiser to think of it like that than to go about saying you do not believe in hell. I never read that even Judas went there. I read that Judas went *to his own place*. Being let go by his own act of suicide, he went to his own company—the rest is silence. God grant us all such love for what is good, such kinship of heart with the brave and the pure and the lowly, such secret comradeship with all who are wrestling heavenward in the living fellowship of Jesus Christ, that when death comes, and the prison doors are opened, and we go to our own company at last, we may go to be for ever with the Lord.

THE MERCY OF OBLIVION

God hath made me forget.—Gen. xli. 51.

To-DAY in the good providence of God we have reached the last Sabbath of another year. We have won to it in safety and in peace because of a goodness that has never failed us. Another spring has come and passed away with its rich promise and its joy of life. And summer has gone with its long days of gladness, and autumn with its mellowing of beauty. And now we are at the closing of the year, not ignorant of the mercy which has guarded us; for it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, and because his compassions flow and fail not. That is one great office of such days. They bid us halt a moment as we journey. They interrupt the stealthy lapse of time, like the stone flung into the silent stream. On such a day even the lightest-minded cannot but think a little of his

past, of all he has won and lost, and done and suffered, since the bells rang in New Year twelve months ago.

Now in the year just drawing to its close there is many a season you cannot but remember. There are experiences of sunshine and shadow that pass before you in vision as I speak. It may be you have been crushed by a deep sorrow. It may be you have been filled with a great joy. There is some hour for you in these twelve months that is finely and indelibly registered. Or it may be the year has been marked for you rather by those slow and silent changes which, in their movement hardly realised, leave men so strangely altered in the end. Such remembrances of bygone things you call to the 'sessions of silent thought' to-day. You remember all the way that God hath led you to test and try you and see what was in your heart. And sure I am that no one can do *that* without a deepened sense of the Eternal, and a certain wonderment of quiet gratitude for the goodness and the mercy of the road.

But if God to-day is making us remember, is he not also making us forget? All that we

can recall out of the closing year is but the tiniest part of what has happened. Think of the myriad thoughts that flashed on you which by no effort you can summon back. Think of the million words your lips have uttered which have winged their flight into oblivion. Think of the million actions you have done of which your memory presents no record : think of all the print which you have read. Countless events have sunk into oblivion. They have fled silently beyond our ken. God hath so made us that we remember much, but we forget far more than we remember. And what I want to do to-night is this—I want to show you how blessed is that ministry ; I want to disclose to you in groping fashion that sweet may be the uses of oblivion.

In passing let me point out to you that this is only a temporary ministry. He maketh us to forget because he loves us, but he doth not make us to forget for ever. We know how at a touch the past may live again, and things flash forth we thought to be forgotten. Like the little maiden in the home of Galilee, events we reckon dead are only sleeping. And so mysterious and unexpected and unaccountable

are these revivals, that thinkers have conjectured we forget nothing. Our past has not vanished as the shadows vanish which travel in autumn across the field of corn. It has vanished like those old Egyptian marbles over which the desert sand has drifted. And just as a mighty wind will take that sand, and scatter it, and give the marble up, so God may give us back the past again. There are well-known and accredited instances in which a drowning man has recalled his life. Incidents long forgotten have revived, and the dead past has crowded on his brain. And if that be so in such an hour, when the rushing of the great deeps is in the ear, may it not be so where there is no more sea? What I want you to feel is that our to-day's forgetfulness is but a brief and temporary ministry. It is part of the loving artifice of God for the immediate comfort of his children. And I shall try to show you how it blesses us, and helps us onward more than we have thought, and how without it life might be intolerable.

The first use of oblivion is this, that it enables us to see the past more truly. God hath so made us that we must forget in the interest of

spiritual vision. When you stand too close to a great picture, you know that you cannot really see the picture. It does not render up its wealth of meaning, nor minister any joy in its perfection. And you are not blind because you see too little ; you are really blind because you see too much —you lose the joy of the whole in the detail. There are a thousand touches on that canvas which were all demanded for the one effect. The artist needed every roughened line to body out what was glowing in his soul. And yet it is not by seeing all these touches that his conception flashes upon you ; it is by standing back where they are hidden. As it is with the noble art of painting so is it with the experience of life. God sinks into oblivion a thousand details that we may reach the meaning of the whole. He maketh us forget, and so forgetting, all that is large and vital is illuminated, and renders up to us that general meaning which in the hour we had not eyes to see. You know how seldom we understand a thing in the very moment when that thing is happening. If it be a sorrow we hardly realise it. If it be a choice we know not what it means. And then the quiet days come, and we

look back upon it, and we understand it now in its true bearings, not merely because God hath made us to remember but also because he hath made us to forget. All that was trivial has passed away. All that was accidental is submerged. The hand of time has taken down the scaffolding, and there is the building in its fair proportion. Thus is it that our life grows richer by seeing the larger meanings of our providences, and God hath fashioned us to see these meanings by suffering us for a season to forget.

Not only does that apply to experiences. With equal force does it apply to character. It is by forgetting as well as by remembering that we gain our insight into those we love. Has it never occurred to you as strange that so much of the life of Jesus should be hidden? Think of his boyish years—the years at Nazareth—almost the whole of them is in oblivion. And yet when Mary after the crucifixion went home and lived with the apostle John, do not you think that the talk would be of Nazareth? John must have known a thousand things of Christ which you and I would give a world to know. Yet something sealed the lips of that evangelist,

and not one of them is written in his story. I feel that if you want to know what is meant by the inspiration of the Scripture you must think of its silence as well as of its speech. If we knew more of Christ in such detail I say with reverence we should know less. God has deliberately sunk much in oblivion that you and I might *see*, and seeing worship. And what is true of Christ, and true for ever, is also true of all whom we have lost—to know them we must remember *and forget*. That is why time as it goes dragging on is one of the healing messengers of God. It takes this little fault and buries it. It lays that little harshness in the grave. And we forget it, for it was never vital, though once it was mighty to becloud our vision, and so forgetting we come at last to see. All that was deepest and tenderest and best begins at length to shine on us undimmed. There is nothing to mar it now or to obscure it. God has flung all that into the dark. So do men come to understand their dead, and to see them as they never saw them once, not only because God hath made them to remember, but also because he hath made them to forget.

In the second place I would point out to you that forgetfulness is necessary to happiness. Let me try to explain to you why that is so.

When we stand on the threshold of our life it is from the future that we draw our happiness. A child is in the future all the time, and to the child the future is of gold. How eagerly does it anticipate a holiday! With what intensity Christmas is expected! To-day there may be tears and disappointments, but there are never tears in any child's to-morrow. But as the years roll on, and as the shadows fall, there comes a strange reversal of expectancy, for the solace of the future becomes feebler, and there arises the solace of the past. Once the avenues were all untrodden, but now we have trod and trafficked in them all. Once we knew not what a day might bring, but now there is little left that can surprise. Anticipations which thrilled us long ago, so that we could not sleep, or sleeping, dreamed of them, stir not the quiver of a leaf to-day. It is then, as the solace of the future wanes, that the solace of the past grows stronger. It is always a token that we are growing older when we come to find our comfort in the past. The talk of childhood is anticipative,

but the talk of age is reminiscent—of the old scenes, of the old days, of the old familiar faces. Now then will you tell me this, what is it which makes that past so golden? It was *not* golden when it was a present. Why when it is a past should it be so? And part of the secret is to be found in this, that God, enriching us with tender memories, casts over many an unpleasant hour the divine mantle of forgetfulness. It is in *that* sense that our forgetfulness has a large part to play in giving happiness. It is in the past that God has sown the seed of some of our truest and our tenderest solace. And much of that solace never could be ours unless, with all the magic of the memory, a thousand trifles and a thousand frets were sunk for a little while into oblivion.

We see that with great clearness upon the larger stage of history. We see it in that expression which we use—the good old times. Now if you and I could be suddenly transferred into the midst of these good old times, not only would they be no longer old—I venture to say they would be no longer good. Breaking upon us in their harsh reality, with every circumstance full in the eye of day, it is not likely that we should call them good;

it is more likely that we should call them evil. To-day we think of them as picturesque. We should not call them so if we were there. Gone would their charm be, and all their sweet romance, and the air of quietness that broods upon them. Instead of that, what a world we should discover of sordid and of drab detail, with much to shock us in its daily ordering, and in its discomfort and disregard of pain. It is out of such unpromising material that God delights us with the good old times. He takes a multitude of sordid things and sweeps them off into oblivion. And then he bids us recreate the past, and body it out that it may be a solace, and clothe it for our comfort and our joy in the light that never was on sea or land.

Now as it is on the larger stage of history, so on the lesser stage of our own life. For a golden past we must remember, but for a golden past we must forget. If we remembered every shower of rain, we should lose the solace of the vanished sunshine. If we remembered every little ache we suffered, the peace of the old days would all be marred. If we remembered every mood and feeling, every misunderstanding of a moment, the solace of recollection would be gone. All

of us have scenes we love to visit, they are so bright with the radiance of other days. They are steeped for us, and shall be steeped for ever, in a mystical light as of a world of dreams. But could the actual past which we associate with them be recollected in its tiniest feature, that peace, and all the solace of that peace, would take to itself wings and fly away. God wants us to have the gladness of the past, and so he blesses us with large oblivion. He banishes in his love a thousand things which irritated once and still would irritate. He keeps alive for us some simple elements, some few impressions with the touch of heaven, and out of these we recreate a past that as a matter of history never was a present. None of us thinks the past just as it was. We think the past as we would have it be. Things that were vexing—things that marred and maimed—somehow we are so made that we can drop them. And so our past is an ideal possession—a thing of beauty and a joy for ever—not only because God makes us to remember, but also because he makes us to forget.

Then in the third place we shall notice this, that forgetfulness is necessary for action. God

grants it that we may understand the past ; he grants it that we may have courage for the future.

Now do not misunderstand me when I say that. I do not mean that that alone is necessary. There is much in your past and there is much in mine which only to remember makes us strong. When David was going out to fight Goliath, what was it that gave him hope of victory ? It was that God had helped him in the past when he was attacked by the lion and the bear. And there is not one of us this Sabbath day but would have heart and hope for the New Year if we would but think of all that God has done for us. Just as a miner in the Australian goldfields washes away the sand and keeps the gold, so you and I out of our past should gather up all we have found of God. And when we do it, and when we see his goodness, and when we find how he has kept and blessed us, such memory will make us valiant for to-morrow.

But there is more than God in a man's past. There is self and there is sin in it. What of the wasted hours of the year, and of the idle words that we have spoken, and of the sins that we call little sins, though in the eyes of God they may be

great? If these were to rise and throng about us now, while we have a life to live and work to do, I say they would crush us to the very dust. Every bird would cease to sing for us. Every gleam of sunshine would be darkened. Haunted and beset by our mad folly, we should be cowards at the trumpet-call. So God, who does not want us to be cowards, for spite of all that we have been he needs us still, in his loving-kindness maketh us forget. He will not have us hampered by our failures. He will not have us crushed by our mistakes. He will not have us tied to a dead past by the appalling memories of sin. He comes to-day and says to us in mercy, 'Thy sins which are many are forgiven thee. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' It is because he loves us and believes in us that he touches us with the mercy of oblivion. He knows that there is far more in us than all the past has ever yet revealed. He loves us. He does not want us hampered. He wants us to be free, and facing heavenward. Go in peace, he says. The best is still before thee. Let the dead past bury its dead.

THE WONDER OF THAT NIGHT

The same night in which he was betrayed.—1 Cor. xi. 23.

ATTENTION has been directed in these days of ours to what is called the method of suggestion. The power of suggestion to influence thought and conduct is one of the great themes of educational science. We are taught that beneath our consciousness there is a whole world within each of us that lies asleep, and that it depends on the suggestive touch whether it wake to evil or to good. Now there can be little question that in throwing in this clause, Paul is acting on the method of suggestion. He is not just stating an historic fact, nor indicating a bare point of time. He is conveying to the Corinthian church, by the suggestion of the betrayal-night, a veiled and delicate rebuke.

Recall the circumstances of that church at Corinth. It was in a sad and pitiable state. It

was rent with such unseemly factions that any one but Paul would have despaired of it. A church is always in the most deadly peril when its divisions are felt at the Lord's Table. It is bad enough when they interfere with service ; it is far worse when they invade the sacrament. Yet at Corinth that was what had happened, and brotherly love had vanished from the sacrament, and pride and selfishness and disregard of decency had reared their heads at the communion table. It was to such a church that Paul was writing when he said, '*On that night in which he was betrayed.*' Let them but think of that, in all the pathos of it, and it would shame them into a better spirit. How could any of them be proud again, or drunken, or scornful of the poor, when they remembered that their feast was instituted in the infinite sorrow of betrayal-night. In other words Paul flung this clause in to quicken and intensify right feeling. It was not an item of information merely ; it was a call to worthier communicating. And so this evening we shall think of it for a little, and try to find how it can be of service in kindling or strengthening those feelings that fit us for the Table of the Lord.

First then, when we recall what night it was, we feel afresh the wonder of Christ's thanksgiving.

One of the great features of the Last Supper was the prayer of thanksgiving which Jesus offered. It had its place, no less than the breaking of the bread, in the revelation which Paul had had from Christ. What was included in that thanksgiving is one of the things which God has hidden from us. We know from the Gospels that the bread and wine were blessed, but no one imagines that *that* was all. Clearly, there was such an outpouring of the heart, such adoration of the Heavenly Father, that none of the little band in that upper room ever forgot it to his dying day. John carried the thought of it to Ephesus. Peter recurred to it in distant Babylon. It had moved them to a depth of awe and wonder that was vivid to their last hour of ministry. Whenever they met to break the bread again, on distant shores, and after the lapse of years, swift as an arrow-flight their hearts went back to the wonderful thanksgiving of Jesus.

So powerfully has that been impressed upon the church that thanksgiving has always distin-

guished the Lord's Table. In every fellowship and throughout all the ages one great mark of the sacrament is gratitude. One of the oldest names for the feast is eucharist, and eucharist is the Greek for thanksgiving. One of the oldest traditions of the Table is that the poor should be remembered at it. And all this thankfulness, expressed in name and offertory, is not only the witness of our debt to God ; it is the witness also of the depth of feeling that was stirred by the thanksgiving of Jesus. It is that which is written out in after ages. It is that which is testified to in every sacrament. Every time we meet to break the bread we touch on the wonder of the upper room. We touch on the awe that filled the little company, as with the filling of the Holy Ghost, when they listened, with rapt hearts and straining ears, to the thanksgiving of their Master and their Lord.

Now what was it made that thanksgiving so wonderful? Well, that is a question we cannot fully answer. It may be that even had you and I been there we could not have explained why we were moved so. But this is certain, that as the days went on, and the disciples looked back upon

it all, the thanksgiving grew doubly wonderful to them because of the hour in which it had been spoken. On that night in which he was being betrayed—it was on *that* night our Lord broke into thanks. Think of it, in such an hour as that, no room for anything but an adoring gratitude! No wonder Peter never could forget it—no wonder John never could forget it—they never could forget that joy in God in the tense agony of the betrayal-night. Had Christ been looking for triumph on the morrow they might more easily have comprehended it. Had he been ringed about with perfect loyalty—they could have understood it then. But on that night on which he was betrayed—that *then*, in such an hour, Christ should adore, was something that grew and deepened in its mystery the more they brooded on it in the years.

In the second place, when we recall what night it was, we feel anew the wonder of Christ's certainty.

There is nothing more notable in the memorial supper than the perfect confidence of Jesus in the future. No trace of doubt can be detected in him—no slightest misgiving seems to have

crossed his heart—as he looked away from his own little company down the ages that were yet to be. Like all great moments in our earthly life, the Lord's Supper has a twofold reference. It reaches back into the dear dead days; it stretches forward to the untrodden future. And one of the singular things about our Lord which has attracted the eyes of every age, is that at the Table, looking forward, he was possessed with a quiet and perfect confidence. ‘This do in remembrance of me,’—then he was to be loyally and lovingly remembered. ‘Ye do show the Lord's death until he come,’—then his memory was to last while the world lasted. In loving hearts, right through the ages, on and on till the last trumpet sounded, Christ never doubted that his name would live in warm and powerful memorial. Had he looked with quiet confidence across the *past*, it would not have arrested us so much. For all the past had been leading up to him, and he had perfectly fulfilled the will of God. But that with equal confidence, unsullied and serene, he should have anticipated all coming time, is something that has always stirred the church.

Of course it is possible to minimise this

thought, as it is possible to belittle everything about Christ. We are told that he was thinking only of his own here, and that his coming was expected in a year or two. There was no vision of the coming centuries—no thought of you and me this evening—it was a word spoken to the disciples only, till in a dozen years or so their Lord should come again. Now mark you, there is much to be said for that view, or thinking men would never have advanced it. But deeper than any arguments in favour of it is its injustice to the *spirit* of the scene. And once we have grasped the spirit of the scene, and turn to the life of Christ for confirmation of it, we see that it is something more than sentiment which finds the centuries in the heart of Jesus here. We learn from some of his most familiar parables how slowly and gradually the kingdom was to come. It could no more be hurried on than one could hasten the growing of the mustard-seed. We learn, too, that Jesus had an eye which ranged away beyond the bounds of Israel : ‘Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’ It is that far-ranging and large spirit which you must carry into the upper room. An hour of high

intensity like this was certain to be an hour of vision. If ever Christ saw imperially and magnificently, and we know from other sources that he did, would it not be on the eve before that day which was to close his earthly ministry by death? I believe, then, that in the upper room Jesus had an eye for all the ages. I believe that he was looking down the centuries to the table which is spread for you and me. And the singular thing is that with a range like that, over the illimitable fields of time, Christ should have shown such quiet and perfect confidence.

It is that wonder which is deepened as we recall the season when it was exhibited. Do we not feel afresh the marvel of such confidence *on that night in which he was betrayed?* Now it was evident beyond dispute what was moving in the heart of Judas. Now at last came leaping to the surface the treachery that had been brooded on in secret. And if this was the issue of the years of fellowship—this unutterable malice of to-day—was it likely there would be a bright to-morrow? Christ had spared no pains on his betrayer. He had lavished his love upon him constantly. He had done everything to woo and

win him, and every effort he had made was baffled. And it was *then*, in such a bitter hour, when he well might have lost his faith in human loyalty, that he looked forward with confidence unquenched to the loyal remembrance of the ages. Christ knew, in the quiet of that evening, what was involved in the treachery of Judas. Already he saw the shadow of the cross and heard the evil voices crying ‘Crucify him.’ Yet with so much to drive him to despair—so much to suggest to him that he had failed—with a heart as calm as any summer sea he looked away to the loyalty of time. ‘This do in remembrance of me : ye do show the Lord’s death till he come.’ Think of it, this grand unfaltering confidence amid the despairing horrors of that night! It would have been wonderful at any time, but surely we feel afresh the wonder of it when we remember that it was exhibited on the night in which he was betrayed.

Then lastly, when we recall what night it was, we feel afresh the wonder of Christ’s love.

The Lord’s Table is a feast of love, and yet the word *love* was never spoken at it. It is the picture of a love that is commended to us

not so much in words as in deeds. In the early church they used to have a love-feast, and the love-feast was at first associated with the sacrament. But gradually, and with growing insight, the love-feast fell into disuse. Men came to feel that they did not need a love-feast to express the love that was in Christ ; it was exhibited in all its height and depth in the simple ritual of the Supper. Here in the quiet of the upper chamber was given the pledge of a love that was unquenchable. Here was there gathered into one swift moment the yearning and the tenderness of years. Here did there flash out, as in a flame of glory, the love which had been striving through the past, and which to-morrow, on the cross of anguish, was to be consummated and crowned in sacrifice.

Now do you not feel the wonder of that love afresh as you recall when it was pledged and sealed? That sealing would have been wonderful at any time, but on such a night as that it passeth knowledge. Had it been some Pharisee who was betraying him, we should not have marvelled at it so. But it was no Pharisee—no enemy—it was his own familiar friend in whom he trusted. Yet in the very hour of his betrayal, when any

other heart might have grown bitter, Christ deliberately seized his opportunity to show forth and to seal his dying love. Mazzini, that great-heart of Italy, tells us something of his sad experience. He tells us how bitter he grew—how sick of soul—when the men who had followed him fell away from him. But on that night when all forsook him there is not one trace of hardening in Christ ; on the contrary, it was that hour he chose to institute the memorial of his love. Is not this the wonder of Christ's love, that right through that betrayal it survived? And the question is, have not we too betrayed him since we last gathered at the Communion Table? God knows we have, yet shall we eat and drink because of a love that has survived *our* past—that has forgiven everything in mercy, and in mercy will not let us go.

THE GRACE OF HAPPY-HEARTEDNESS

I would have you without carefulness.—1 Cor. vii. 32.
Cast thy burden upon the Lord.—Ps. lv. 22.

THERE are few graces which the world admires so much as the grace of happy-heartedness. There is a certain perennial attraction in men and women who bear their burdens well. When we see a face all lined with care it often touches the chord of pity in us. We are moved to compassion when it flashes on us what a story is engraven there. But the face that really helps us on our journey is seldom the face of battle and of agony; it is the face which has its sunshine still. None of us is enamoured by a frown. All of us are attracted by a smile. We recognise by an unerring instinct that in happy-heartedness there is a kind of victory. And so we love it as we love the sunshine or the song of the birds upon the summer morning. It takes its place with these good gifts of God.

That is one of the great charms of children.

They are possessors of this sunny attribute. That is one reason why the presence of children is such a perpetual solace and refreshment. Children are far from being little angels, as every father and every mother knows. They can be cruel, and intensely selfish, and amazingly and unblushingly untruthful. Yet when the worst is said of them that can be said, there yet remains in them this touch of heaven which is a greater blessing to the world than all the wonders of wireless telegraphy. They cry, and then in the passing of an hour the heart that was inconsolable is healed. They scowl (and they are not pretty when they scowl), but so far as I know them they never bear any malice. They bully in the most shocking fashion, when you and I happen to be absent, but if they bully they almost never brood. ‘I would have you without carefulness’—that is how the great apostle puts it. He was one of these men whose interests were too vast to allow him time for watching little people. But Christ, whose interests were far vaster, somehow or other always had time for that, and so he puts it, *not* ‘I would have you without carefulness,’ but ‘except ye become as little children.’

Of course we must distinguish happy-heartedness from that poor counterfeit we call frivolity. A child may be absolutely irresponsible, but a child is never really frivolous. No one is so swiftly touched to wonder. No one is so deeply moved with awe. When our children laugh at what to us is sacred, it simply means that they do not understand. The things that are wonderful and great in their eyes are not at all what we consider so, and mark you, you never find them mocking at what is wonderful and great to *them*. Now that is the very hall-mark of frivolity. It recognises what is great and jests at it. It is not an intellectual inability; it is much more truly a moral inability. Some of the most frivolous people I have known had plenty brains, and were as sharp as needles; it was their heart and not their brain which was contemptible. The great instance of frivolity in Scripture is that of the men who refused the invitation. They were by no means intellectual fools, these men. They could do a bit of work and do it admirably. But when this moment came they all made light of it—they took it as a jest though it was kingly—they lost the opportunity of their lives because of

their old habit of belittling. Different by all the world from that is the sweet genius of happy-heartedness. It is as swift to recognise the best as is frivolity to have a laugh at it. Indeed so far as my experience goes, frivolous people are commonly unhappy, and are very often trying to forget something which is akin to tragedy.

Now we are all apt to think that this happy-heartedness is temperamental. We are apt to think it is just born with people, and of course in a measure that is true. There *are* Mark Tapleys in the world, and men like Burton of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*. There are those with a perfect genius for the sunshine, and those with a perfect genius for the shadow. There are those who will carry a burden in a happy way without the slightest aid from any faith, and you, who wrestle in prayer about the thing, are bowed with it to the very ground. And not only is it temperamental. We might go further and say that it is racial. Broadly speaking, as we survey the world, we find it to be a national characteristic. For the Irish have it and the Scots have not; and the southern peoples and not the northern peoples; and the Kaffir boy out in South Africa

will go singing and laughing over his work all day, while his Dutch master, for all his Bible reading, will have a face as long as his own prayers.

But there is one thing in the Bible I have often noticed. I wonder if it has occurred to you? It is how often it classes with virtues to be won what we have reckoned to be gifts of nature. The Bible is always true to the great facts. It never diminishes nor distorts anything. It recognises in the most liberal way the infinite divergencies of nature. And yet I say I am often struck by this, how often it takes these natural endowments, and says to you of what you do *not* have—‘that is a virtue to be won.’ Think of courage—do not we regard that as a gift? Do not we know that certain men are born courageous? Do you think every boy could say what Nelson said : ‘Fear, mother—what is fear? I never saw it?’ And yet this courage, which with perfect justice we are in the way of regarding as temperamental, is viewed in Scripture as something to be won. Take joy. Are we the masters of our joy? Is not the capacity for joy inherent? Are there not those who gravitate to joy as there are others

who gravitate to gloom? And yet our Saviour says to his disciples, ‘These things have I spoken to you, that in me ye might have joy.’ And the fruit of the spirit is love and joy and peace.

Well now as it is with these, so I take it is with happy-heartedness. In the eyes of God and in the light of Scripture it is a shining virtue to be won. It may be easier for some than others just because of the nature God has given. But remember we do not win our best when we have won our most congenial virtues. Happy-heartedness is possible for all—that is what I want to urge to-night—and the unfailing secret of it lies in the casting of the burden on the Lord. It does not matter what the burden be. Burdens are just as various as blessings. They may be secret, or they may be public. They may be real, or they may be imaginary. But once a man has learned this deepest lesson that God is with him and will see him through, I say to the weariest and most desponding soul that happy-heartedness is in his grasp. Many of the heaviest burdens men can bear have to be borne where eyes can never pierce. Many of the heaviest burdens men can bear fall on them through the relationships of life. It

matters not. There can be no exceptions in the magnificent impartiality of God. *Cast thy burden on the Lord.*

Now I want you to notice—it is very important—the words in which our text is couched. It is ‘cast thy burden *on the Lord*'; it is not ‘cast thy burden anywhere.' I think there is nothing poorer or more cowardly than just the desire to be rid of burdens. It is always the mark of meanness in a character, and the sorry witness of a contracting soul. For life grows richer by what we have to bear, and sympathies grow tenderer and broader, and the world expands into a richer place through things which we once thought would make us poorer. They say that the Indian, putting his ear to the ground, can hear far off the galloping of horses. Erect, there is not a sound upon the breeze. Prone on the earth, he hears the distant trampling. And I daresay there are some here to-night who lived and moved upon a silent prairie until somehow they were bowed into the dust. The Bible never urges any man recklessly to cast his cares away. As soon would it urge the captain of a ship to cast out his ballast when he was clear of port. Knowing the precious-

ness of what is heavy, it bids us summon to our aid the power of God, and it is *that* which makes all the difference in the world. Now we know we are in the hands of One who providently caters for the sparrow. Now we know that on the line of duty we shall have strength for all that must be done. Now we can laugh with the children in the thick of it, and have our sunshine even in November, for God is with us, and his name is wonderful, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

In closing I have one thing more to say—one thing I never think of without shame. It is how much easier this secret is for us than it ever can have been for David. ‘Cast thy burden on the Lord,’ he wrote—and of course he had first done it for himself. Now tell me, what was that Lord to David—that Lord into whose keeping he committed everything? He was the King eternal and invisible, and clouds and darkness were around his throne, and men looked to the left hand and he was not there, and to the right and lo! they could not find him. Was not the faith of these old Jews magnificent? Could you have trusted in such a God as that? Could you have believed

that the infinite Creator would open his arms and take your burden in? It might have been easy for a Greek to do it, for he believed in the divinity of man; but how a Jew rose to a faith like that is to me as wonderful as any miracle.

But do you see how everything is changed now? We have *Christ*; and that makes all the difference. For do you remember how when Christ was here men came and cast their burdens upon him? Every one did it, and did it as by instinct—it did not matter what the burden was—and ‘he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.’ Run through the gamut of our human burdens, and tell me if there were any that they failed to bring. They brought their sicknesses and they brought their fears. They brought their children and they brought themselves. And the strange thing is that though Christ was angry sometimes, and his eyes flashed in righteous indignation, not in a single instance do you find him angry because any one cast a burden upon him.

My brother and sister, if your faith is to be real, shall I tell you what you must always do? You must always carry into your thought of God what you have learned and seen of Jesus Christ.

‘He that hath seen me hath seen the Father :’ he is the express image of his person. You must carry up into your thought of God all the revelation of his Son. And I tell you that when you once do that the Fatherhood of God becomes so wonderful that even you, with your weak and trembling faith, are able to cast your burden upon him. It took a hero to achieve it once. The weakest woman can achieve it now. It was once the act of a sublime enthusiasm. It is now within the reach of every one of you. So sure are we in Christ of God’s deep sympathy, and of his care for us, and of his love, that there is not a man or woman here who may not know the strength of happy-heartedness. Therefore I charge you in the name of Christ that you are not to let that burden weigh you down. I charge you to remember that you sin if you live in gloom and miserable wretchedness. Never frivolous, but always reverent—happy-hearted just because *he* knows—I know no better way in this strange world of glorifying the Father and the Son.

THE UPLIFT OF THE BODY

He is the Saviour of the body.—Eph. v. 23.

STUDENTS of the New Testament must often have remarked the large place which is there given to the body. Our text is only one of many passages which arrest us with this unusual emphasis. Of all the books in the world's literature there is none which insists upon the soul so urgently ; yet is there no book in the world's literature which has done so much to dignify the body. One of the errors of popular evangelism is that it thinks of nothing but the soul. That too was one of the errors of monasticism, and indeed ultimately proved its overthrow. It was false to the noble proportions of the Bible, and tried to spurn what Scripture never spurns, and in the long run had to pay for that by being swept into oblivion. It is extraordinary how many people want to be a little wiser than the Bible. It is

extraordinary how many people want to be a little more spiritual than Christ. They take the part and treat it as the whole ; they are blind to everything except the spirit ; they never seem to have caught the flash of glory that the Bible has cast upon the body. ‘We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the redemption of the *body*.’ ‘Know ye not that your *body* is a temple of the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in you?’ ‘I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your *bodies* a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.’ Such words, and they might be multiplied by ten, are not at all impertinent intrusions. They are inwrought into the web of Scripture, and they are part and parcel of its message ; until at last, by such recurrent whispers, and by a hundred other hints and shadowings, we come to see that the Word of God in Christ is the true charter of the human body.

Now I question if we always realise the importance of this gospel emphasis. For we have never known the outlook of the heathen, nor have we been ‘suckled in a pagan creed.’ To know what Christianity has done for women, we should need to have lived before Jesus Christ was

born ; and we should need to have lived before Jesus Christ was born to know what it has accomplished for the body. It is true that among the ancient Greeks, whose worship was just the worship of the beautiful, the charm of physical beauty was appreciated as perhaps it has never been appreciated since. But a nation, like an individual, may be exquisitely sensitive to beauty, and yet may wallow, as I fear the Greeks wallowed, in horrible and disgusting sin. To the pagan the body was a slave, and no one troubles how you treat a slave. To the pagan the body was a curse, for evil had its seat and centre in the flesh. Or at the best the body was a clog, a sorry prison for an immortal spirit, a scaffolding that would be knocked in pieces when the palace-courts within were perfected. You cannot wonder that with thoughts like these, the pagan world was sunk in immorality. You cannot wonder at what we read in *Romans*, when you remember what the Romans held. And what I say is that you *must* remember it—you must remember the depth and the disgrace—if you would understand what Christ has done in rescuing the body from dishonour. No longer can we treat the body as

an alien. We have learned that it is a friend and not an enemy. It is no prison-house with grated windows; it is a temple where the Spirit dwells. And such is the honour that has fallen upon it that even the bodies of our dead are precious, and are clothed in white and laid in the quiet grave with a certain gentle reverence and respect. It was one of the first effects of Christianity that it put a stop to the burning of the dead. Men felt that it was a kind of sacrilege to burn a temple of the Holy Ghost. And that alone, which everywhere and always accompanied the preaching of the gospel, will show you what a change had been effected in the popular conception of the body. Now this is the question which I want to ask, How did the gospel of Jesus work that change? How did it lift the body from the mire, and crown it with glory and with honour? What are the new facts, or what the doctrines, which have given to the body such high dignity, that we may say of Christ unhesitatingly, he is the Saviour of the *body*?

The first is the great fact of the Incarnation. It is the coming of the Son of God in human form. The Son of God dwelt in a human body,

and that has clothed it for ever with nobility. If human flesh and sin were indistinguishable, do you think the Word would have become flesh? Had the flesh been ineradicably vile, would the Son of God have worn it as a garment? Wherever sin may have its source and spring, it is not in the human body, else Christ when he took a body to himself would have taken to be his comrade what was vile. So long as you think of God as far away, so long it is possible to treat the body meanly. For the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, and every sense may be a road to ruin. But if the Son of God has tabernacled here—if perfect purity and love have dwelt here—if the immortal King has stooped to earth and taken to himself the seed of Abraham, then the body never can be despised again. It was *that* fact which altered the world's standpoint and cast a glory on the human frame. The body had been the instrument of sin; now it was made the instrument of Christ. Through human lips the voice of God had spoken. Through human eyes the pity of God had looked. The love of God had wrought through human hands, and gone its errands upon human feet.

We may throw a certain light upon that change by remembering what has happened in other dwellings. If some one whom we reverence has been born there, the place is never mean to us again. There is a house in Stratford built of common brick, not differing outwardly from other houses, yet in that home the poet Shakespeare lived, and to it thousands of pilgrims turn their feet. There is a cottage in Ayrshire, just an 'auld clay biggin,' meanly built, low-roofed, confined and damp, yet in the fulness of the time Burns was born there, and it is not a mean place to Scotland now. And I know a church in one of our Scottish cities, and a very dreary and dingy pile it is, and yet to multitudes it is a holy place because it was the sanctuary of M'Cheyne. It is the genius who adorns the house. It is the saint who glorifies the dwelling. Wherever the home has been of one we love, *there* for ever is a hallowed spot. And when we think of all we owe to Christ, when he became poor for our enriching, it helps us to realise a little better how his coming has glorified the body. He took upon himself the seed of Abraham. Can you dis-honour the seed of Abraham now? He passed

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through the doorway of this little cottage. And will you spit upon the cottage wall? The flesh is vile, said the old pagan thinker—the flesh is the great enemy of the spirit. And John, looking that old world in the face, said, '*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.*'

The second factor in this change of view was the compassionate care of Jesus for the body. And I sometimes think we scarcely realise what is meant by the healing miracles of Christ. We study the separate miracles apart till we almost forget the import of the whole. We treat them as isolated incidents, or as witnesses of Christ's divinity. But the miracles are really more than that. They are a revelation rather than an argument. They are not added to confirm the mission, but are themselves a vital part of it. They teach us that this despised body is part of the manhood which the Lord redeems. They teach us that the love of God for man is love for the body as well as for the soul. They teach us that there is no part nor organ, nor any faculty nor sense nor limb, but has a share in that redeeming work which brought our Saviour from the throne to Calvary. Do you remember how Christ

refused to interfere when one wanted him to interpose about his property? ‘Master, speak to my brother on the matter’—and Jesus refused to speak a word. But tell me, did he ever refuse to interfere when the blind eyes looked up to him for sight?—or when the foot was lame or when the arm was helpless or when the tongue was sealed within the lips? Always remember that the love of Christ encompasses every organ we possess. It is the love of God touching the human frame that it might never be bestial any more. We have a beautiful hymn which we are fond of singing. It is ‘*Jesus, Lover of my soul.*’ But I want some one to write me another hymn, beginning ‘*Jesus, Lover of the body.*’

I think, too, that when we remember this, we see more clearly why miracles have ceased. I daresay to some of you it has seemed strange sometimes that there are no such miracles to-day. Have you not longed for a miracle of healing, when some one whom you loved was very ill? Have you not thought how all the world would sing if that cold face would only smile again? And if Christ is the same to-day in love and power as when he moved along the ways of

Galilee, why, you wonder, should it not be so? Still in the world are eyes that cannot see and lips that crave for utterance in vain. Still in the world are little suffering children, and loved ones whose brows are drawn in anguish. And Christ—where is his hand of healing, and where his touch that brought the strength again, and where his voice that spoke and men were cured and the light of life came thrilling to the dead? Now will you just remember what was the deep purpose of these miracles? Will you remember that they were wrought to teach us that the body is the temple of the Holy Ghost? And if that lesson has been learned by Christendom so that Paul could say 'He is the Saviour of the body,' then the work of the healing miracles is done. Nay, I beg of you, say not it is done. Its spirit is moving in a thousand channels. It has founded the hospital and built the infirmary, and inspired the science and the skill of Christian medicine. It has passed into the life of every doctor who is walking worthy of his high vocation. It has possessed the heart of every true nurse. The lesson of the miracles was mastered, and the great Teacher laid aside the lesson-book.

But when a lesson has been learned—what then? Does it not mean that we are fit for greater things? So ‘greater things than these shall ye do’ said the Lord—greater things even than a miracle; and in the sympathy and skill and care of Christendom that promise has been abundantly fulfilled.

Then the third factor in that change of view was the doctrine of the resurrection of the body.

One of the greatest thinkers of the ancient world, in what is perhaps his choicest dialogue, has given us in his own matchless way some of the reasons why men should welcome death. He felt that the fear of death was an unworthy fear, and he tried to combat it by quiet argument, and one of his strongest arguments is this, that at death we have done for ever with the body. We shall never more be clogged and fretted by it. It will never hamper the bright soul again. Death is the bird escaping from its cage. Death is the prisoner breaking from his cell. The kindest attribute of death, for Plato, was not just that a man would be at rest then. It was that a man after his weary battle would have done for ever with a body.

Brethren, who name the name of Christ with me, do you always remember that that is *not* our faith? We believe in the Holy Ghost and in the Catholic Church and *in the resurrection of the body*. That is one thing which Jesus never doubted. That is one mystery he never questioned. And now it has passed from the consciousness of Christ into the consciousness of all his people. If there be any meaning in his empty grave, and if our bodies are a living sacrifice, then in the future, body, soul, and spirit, we shall be for ever with the Lord. It was that mystery, touching a thousand hearts, which set a halo of glory on the body. It was the thrill of resurrection-doctrine, and the open secret of the empty grave. It was the certainty that the glad day was coming when the body of our humiliation would be changed, and would be fashioned by the power of God into the likeness of the body of Christ's glory.

And so I ask you, as I close, to think again of sins against the body. In the light of all I have been trying to say to-night I ask you to set these sins you know so well. No one could think that much harm was done if the scaffolding round some

temple were defaced ; and when the Roman sinned against his body, it was only the scaffolding he seemed to touch. But the gospel has banished for ever that conception, for in the light of Christ the temple *is* the body, and hence the heinousness of all such sins for every man who calls himself a Christian. If the body after all were but a cage, it might not be very wrong to be a sensualist. If the body after all were but a prison, the guilt of drunkenness might not be great. But if the body was the home of Jesus—if it is the temple of the Holy Ghost—if Christ has come to ransom and redeem it—if it is to be raised incorruptible and glorious—then drunkenness and uncleanness and excess, and every defiance of the laws of health, are sins not easily to be forgiven. Young men, keep yourselves pure. Young women, be scrupulously modest. You can train your body to be the best of comrades. You can train it to be the deadliest of enemies. What multitudes there are in this great Babylon who have presented their bodies to the devil ! I call you to present yours to God, a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable.

THE DEW AND THE MANNA

And when the dew fell upon the camp, the manna fell upon it.
—Num. xi. 9.

I TAKE it that there is not one of us but is familiar with this ancient story. It is one of those incidents in Holy Scripture which captivated us when we were young. We know how the children of Israel in the wilderness learned terribly the bitterness of hunger. In Egypt, whatever their experience, they had never had experience of that. It was a new and unexpected trial for them, with all the sharp severity of novelty, and it led them to doubt the providence of God. It was then that God sent manna to his people. He gave them the bread of angels in the wilderness. And he gave it to them in this peculiar way—encircled and encompassed with the dew. And it is on that I want to dwell a little, for I think the touch was meant to be significant, being the chosen

method of Jehovah. Let me tell you what it suggests to me.

First, then, I want you to observe how the new was given through the old.

The dew upon the ground was not a new thing. Nobody was startled by the dew. There was not a man there but had seen the dew when he played as a little child beside the Nile. It was old as the first sunrise of creation. It was old as the first glad dawn in paradise. And Lot had brushed it with his hurrying foot as he fled from Sodom on the fatal morning. And the point to note is that in this hour of miracle when God was giving his children what was new, he gave it on the bosom of the old. Now when you come to think of it a little, you will find that God has his way of doing that. He gives his freshest not in isolation but out of the very bosom of the old. He feeds us as with the bread of angels, and yet it is not the angels who dispense it. It is when the dew falls upon the camp, that lo ! the manna lies upon the dew.

Think for instance of how it is with genius. Is not one mark of genius just its newness? In the presence of genius you recognise at once that

here is a new thing in the world. If it be dramatic, like that of Shakespeare, you have some new vision of the human heart. If it be scientific, like that of Newton, you have some new conception of the universe. And yet that newness does not stand apart and out of touch with all that went before ; it is given us out of the bosom of the old. The passions with which a Shakespeare deals, are ancient as is the heart of man. The forces which Sir Isaac Newton finds, have been in action since the world was made. The old and new are strangely linked together in the embracing providence of heaven. The manna is discovered on the dew.

Think again of the Bible. Now one of the great effects of life's experience is to make the Bible a new book to us. The Bible of the man of sixty is not the Bible of the boy of ten. You read a certain verse when you are young, and it may be that it means little to you. And then you go out into the world and fight your battle, and you light thereafter upon that verse again. And you know how often you have found that the promise which meant nothing to you once, is now as fresh and radiant and sustaining as any manna

from an orient heaven. By every duty which we quietly do, and by all the suffering which we are called to bear, by loneliness of heart, by disappointment, the Bible becomes new to you and me. And yet God does not give us a new book ; he gives us new discoveries in an old book. All that revives and feeds us as we journey is brought us from the bosom of the old. The words were there when we were little children. They were there when Bruce was conquering at Bannockburn. They were there when Columba landed on Iona, and when Augustine was in the arms of Monica. And we turn to the Bible, and we get our manna, and we say it is better than the bread of angels ; and still, as with Israel in the wilderness, the manna is on the bosom of the dew.

Or think again of the Lord Jesus Christ. There was always that note of newness about Christ. I think that no one ever met with Christ without feeling that here was something new. Christ always had the charm of unexpectedness. There was a certain mysterious novelty about him. There was that in him which men had never seen before. He was inexplicable and unaccountable. Men followed him through the

streets and saw his works, and said, ‘We have never seen it in this fashion.’ They listened to his words and felt instinctively, ‘Never man spake like this man.’ Here was a life and here a ministry thrilling and quivering with what was new. And yet that Christ—the very bread of heaven—how was he given to our human hunger? Not in the clouds of heaven did he come, nor yet with any sudden flash of splendour: he came by the old way of Jewish history. He was born of a Jewish mother in a manger. He was fed on the hopes and memories of the past. He had an ancestry that ran right back through prophet and through psalmist and through patriarch. It was when the dew fell upon the camp—and the dew had been falling so since the first sunrise—that lo! upon the bosom of the dew there lay the heavenly mystery of manna.

The next thing which these words suggest to me is how the wonderful was given through the common.

Among all the treasures of darkness, to use the prophet’s word, none perhaps is more common than the dew. Its drops are not numbered by the hundred; its drops are numbered by the

million. Try to count them, and you find it hopeless. You will as soon count the sand upon the shore. They hang like a necklet upon every rose, and they sparkle upon every blade of grass. Nothing is more common than the dew—we brush it with our foot and never think of it—and yet on the bosom of that common dew God gave the wonder of the gift of manna. Out of the very heart of what was common there came to Israel what was miraculous. Right in the midst of what was everywhere they had to look for and to find the heavenly. It was a lesson they never would forget, and it is a lesson which is needed still.

Think for example of the realm of nature. I remember reading when I was a boy a book that was called the *Wonders of Creation*. It described Niagara, and Mont Blanc, and certain caves somewhere in America. Now I do not deny that these are wonders. There is something of wonder in everything sublime. In the great mountain, white with eternal snow, there is always something thrilling to the heart. But every year that I live I feel more deeply that there is a wonder more divine than that : it is the wonder which lies

in the heart of what is common. God does not ask you to go a thousand miles if you are bent on seeing what is wonderful. The wonderful is at your very door, if you have eyes to see and hearts to understand. The silence that is in the starry sky, the sleep that is among the lonely hills, the grace of the birch-tree in the city park—is there anything more wonderful than that?

Or passing from nature think of love. Thank God, love is a very common thing. It is not rare as genius is rare. It is just as common as the dew. Its touch is on a million hearts to-night and its joy is resting on a thousand homes, for wherever a mother's heart is, love is there, and in the darkest spot of earth some love is found. And yet to me not genius itself, however wonderful the gift of genius, is half so wonderful as love. Think of everything that love has dared. Think of everything that love has sacrificed. Think what you owe to a dead mother's love, and to the love unspeakable of Jesus Christ. It is not intellect that is life's crowning wonder; the crowning wonder of all life is love, and yet this Sabbath night that love is thrilling in a million common

hearts and common homes. Yes, when the dew fell upon the camp, behold the manna lay upon the dew. Right at the heart of something that was everywhere, God made them look for that which was divine. My brother and sister, it is when you win that vision, and see the wealth of glory in the common, that life ceases to be a weary thing, and grows to be wonderful even at its greyest.

And may I say in passing that this outlook was peculiarly characteristic of our Lord? I think that Christ had learned this lesson perfectly, of looking for the manna in the dew. He never said, 'Consider the wild cataract'; he said, 'Consider the lilies of the field.' He never said, 'Look at the speckled bird'; he said, 'Look at the ravens and the sparrows.' And it was where a thousand lilies of the meadow were waving and bowing in the summer breeze that Jesus found the signature of heaven. Christ saw the wonder in the common flower. Christ felt the wonder of the common heart. For him there was a Peter in a Simon and for him a worshipping woman in a Magdalene. For him, in a tiny grain of mustard seed (and you could put a million in your

hand) there was all the wonder of the heavenly kingdom.

Then lastly these words suggest to me how the useful is given through the beautiful.

Now of course I know quite well that the dew has its own ministries of usefulness ; but the first thing which arrests us in the dew is not its usefulness, it is its beauty. Speaking roughly, the dew was useless to that travelling company of Israel. It could not feed them, nor could it quench their thirst, else they would not have needed water from the rock. And yet every poet in that wandering multitude (and there was many a poetic heart among them) felt the exquisite beauty of the dew. No string of pearls upon the neck of womanhood was such a gracious ornament as this. No pendant of the most lustrous gems flashed with a radiance so exquisite. And what I want you to note is that when God gave the manna—that absolute necessity of life—he gave it all encompassed by that dew. Manna was no luxury to Israel. Manna was a necessity to Israel. Without it, in that harsh and desert place, these men and women and children would have died. And to me it is always pleasant to remember that this necessity and staff

of life was given *not* in unattractive guise, but in the sweet encompassing of beauty.

Now I am not here as a philosopher, nor am I here to talk philosophy. I am not here to speak (though fain I would) on the relations of the useful and the beautiful. But I want you to think—and this is not philosophy—I want you to think that wherever God is working he loves to deal with us as with the Israelites, and to give us the necessary through the beautiful. Think of our daily bread and how we get it. It is through the beauty of the waving cornfield. Think of the moral law and how we get it. It is through the wonderful beauty of the Bible. Think of the first necessity of man—the necessity of being saved from sin. Do we not get it through the perfect grace of the most beautiful life that was ever lived on earth? I know no reason why it should be so excepting simply that God willed it so. Might he not have given us our food without that glory of the autumn corn? It makes me glad to think that he has not done so, but has clad in grace our necessary gifts, giving us at last our bread from heaven in one who was ‘altogether lovely.’

THE PERILS OF UNSETTLEMENT

None of these things move me.—Acts xx. 24.

PAUL was journeying to Jerusalem when he spoke the words of our text. They were addressed to the elders of Ephesus, whom he had summoned to meet him at Miletus. It was a journey attended by much hazard, and Paul was aware how hazardous it was. The spirit of prophecy, in every city, had testified to the hardships that awaited him. Yet though bonds and imprisonment were in his prospect, and perhaps a shadow darker than imprisonment, the apostle was able to say in all sincerity that none of these things moved him. With an unwavering and undaunted heart he held to the route that he had planned. Like his master, in a still darker hour, he set his face steadfastly towards Jerusalem. In other words, this great apostle had overcome the perils of unsettlement, and it is on the perils of

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unsettlement that I should like to speak for a little while this evening.

Now no one can read the New Testament without observing that this was one of the deadliest perils of the apostolic church. However fiercely other evils tried them, this one seems to have had peculiar power. The early Christians, like the Elizabethan mariners, had broken into an untravelled sea. They were beyond the experience of the ages. They lived in the daily hope that Christ was coming. And all this wrought such a ferment in their hearts, and seemed to release them so from common obligations, that with all its victories and all its virtues the early church was a-quiver with unsettlement. Men threw their tools down and refused to work. They studied everything save their own business. Why should they take provident care against to-morrow, when at sunrise to-morrow Christ might come again? So did there spread through apostolic days a spirit of unquiet and unrest, and men, through the very wonder of it all, were prone to be unbalanced for a little.

But though circumstances are very different now, this peculiar danger has not vanished. To-day, not less than in the days of Pentecost, we

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are beset by the perils of unsettlement. I am not speaking of the characteristics of the age, though it is the fashion to call this an unsettled age. I take it that every age which has had life in it has been an unsettled and unsettling age. I speak rather of these large experiences which befall each of us upon our journey, when I say that we are still exposed to the swift and subtle perils of unsettlement. Sometimes they reach us through a staggering sorrow which lays the palace in ruins at our feet. Sometimes through the thrilling of good news, or the excitement or variety of travel. Sometimes through the calling of the summertime, with its mystery of light and beauty, touching our hearts, and strangely stirring them, with cravings which we cannot well interpret. In such ways, and in other ways as evident, are we all in danger of unsettlement. We lose our grip on what we used to cling to. We begin to drag our anchors unexpectedly. We are restless and know not what we want, and we lack the unity that makes for power, and so do we learn out of our own experience the perils which the apostle mastered.

Indeed the very concentration of to-day leads

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to the intensifying of this danger. When life is narrowed into a dull routine unsettlement is very easily wrought. In the old days, when life was larger, men were less ready to be thrown off their balance. Familiar with a wider range of circumstance, they were not so lightly moved away by novelty. But now when that large liberty is gone, and men have to concentrate unceasingly, they have lost the power of responding quietly to what is new or strange or unexpected. They are more easily cast out of their reckoning than men who travelled across a larger field. When life is monotonous even a little incident has the power of disturbing greatly. And so the very monotony of labour, which is so characteristic of to-day, makes it an easier thing to be unsettled.

Let me say in passing that this is a peril from which no man can hope to be exempted. No quiet sheltering of home or task will ward off the inroad of unsettlement. It is true that as life advances it grows less. With the passing of years comes the passing of unrest. In the fulness of its disturbing strength, unsettlement is the pain and privilege of youth. Yet God has so ordered this strange life of ours that into every

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lot, however sheltered, sooner or later there break out of the infinite those things which are mighty to unsettle. There are perils which we can shun in prudence. We can shape our course so as to avoid them. But this is a peril which we cannot shun, though we had all the wisdom of Athene. Suddenly a great sorrow is upon us, or the thrilling of unexpected joy, or we waken to hear, with hearts that burn within us, the calling of another summer-time. From such disturbance there is no escape. We cannot expel the angels when they visit us. We must open the door to them, and bid them welcome, and say, 'Come in, thou blessed of the Lord.' Only thus can we hope to use for good that recurring disturbance of the heart which falls upon us all, in diverse ways, amid the joys and sorrows of humanity.

Well now, let us consider one or two of the evils of unsettlement, and the first and most evident perhaps is this, that it makes our work harder to perform. For most men work is hard enough, even when they give to it an undivided mind. It takes every power and faculty which they possess to be honest toilers in the sight of heaven. But work becomes doubly hard for all of

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us, and to certain natures grows wellnigh impossible, when these powers are inwardly distracted, and will not answer the summons of the hour. It is not easy to do the common duty under the shadow of overwhelming sorrow. It is not easy to ply the daily task under the new glow of a great joy. It is not easy to take the burden up, and to go quietly to our familiar place, when the glad and open world is calling us. That is the commonest peril of unsettlement, and I take it there is no one here but knows it. Labour grows irksome, duty becomes irritating, drudgery is wellnigh intolerable. And yet this drudgery, for every one of us, from the dullard to the loftiest genius, is the one road that leads, o'er moor and fen, to the sunrise and the welcome and the crown.

Another peril of unsettlement is this, that it relaxes the hold of our good habits. We come to find, in our unsettled hours, that they do not hold us so firmly as we thought. Most of us are the creatures of habit in a far larger measure than we think. If it is to them that we owe many a weakness, it is to them also that we owe many a virtue. There are few men who can look

back upon their lives, with gratitude to God that they have done a little, without recognising what a debt they owe to one or two habits which were early formed. Such habits may be very simple, yet they have a wonderfully redeeming power. They redeem every day from being wasted, and every energy from being ineffectual. If a bad habit is the worst of curses, and leads by the road of bondage to the dark, a good habit, through the grace of God, is one of our surest and most priceless blessings. Now it is always one peril of unsettlement that it relaxes the hold of our good habits. It lifts us out of the embrace of good ones, and throws us into the embrace of evil ones. For always, when we lose our self-control, sin, as the Scripture says, coucheth at the door, waiting to call us to what we practised once, but have long through the grace of God forsaken. All men have a hunger for the good, but all men have a bias to the evil. It is that bias which the devil uses in the season of a man's unsettlement. Torn from his centre by unexpected incidence, caught into new and strange environment, a man is in peril because his grip is weakened on the steadyng and simple habits of his past.

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And especially, will you let me say in passing, is this true of the sweet habits of the interior life. Unsettlement is the peculiar enemy of regularity in private prayer. I take it that most men pray in secret. I trust I am not mistaken in so thinking. It may be only a few words—it may be very formal—yet is it better than no prayer at all. But who does not know how this interior grace, which we may have learned beside a mother's knee, is apt to be shed off like an old garment when the hour of unsettlement arrives. I grant you that in a great catastrophe there is an instinct in the heart to pray. It is often then, when all the deeps are broken, that the pride which never prayed is broken too. But in all the lesser unsettlements of life, when there is disturbance only, not catastrophe, there is the constant peril of forgetting the sweet and secret exercise of prayer. I have known men who prayed through years of drudgery, and who ceased it when great good fortune came. I have known men who prayed right through the winter, yet somehow in summer they forgot to pray. I have known men—yes, and women too—who would never have dreamed of omitting prayer at home, who yet omitted it,

not once only, amid the excitement and the stir of foreign travel. That is a grave peril of unsettlement. There is not one of us but is exposed to it. It is appalling how lightly we are held by the secret habits of the interior life. A glimpse of liberty, a day of sunshine, a stroke of luck, a touch of one we love, and it may be—God only knows—that we shall throw ourselves upon a prayerless bed to-night.

Now it is always one mark of a great character not to be easily or lightly moved. A certain quiet and fine stability is generally one of the hall-marks of the noble. When Saul was chosen to be king of Israel, and when the people shouted ‘God save the king,’ we could scarce have wondered if that swift elevation had unsettled him and turned his head a little. And it has always been held as a proof of Saul’s nobility that he passed with a quiet heart through that great hour, and with the cry of the people in his ears went back to guide his father’s plough again. Of course there are natures more prone than others to yield to the pressure of unsettlement. There are dogged natures, and responsive natures, and there always shall be till the trumpet sounds. Still speaking broadly and

generally, we may say that to be unsettled lightly is a bad sign, and that one mark of nobility of character is a quiet and resolute continuance. The question is then how we, not being great, can hope to attain to that continuance. How can we organise into victory the common perils of unsettlement? I shall close by offering a word or two on that.

Let me say first, and in a negative way, that it is but a sorry victory to stand aloof. It is not thus, as I understand my Bible, that God would have his children live. There are men who never take a holiday, they are so filled with dread of its disturbances. Knowing how certainly it will unsettle them, they prefer to forego it altogether. And while in the aged, or the infirm of body, such a reluctance is easily understood, with others it is a road to peace that is perilously near to cowardice. We were never meant to live our lives so. We were never meant to bar the gates like that. To shut the summer out, and to shut love out, is not victory, it is defeat. In many of the choicest gifts of God there is a terrible power of unsettlement, and a Christian was never meant to reject the

gift because of the unsettlement it brings. There was once a philosophy which wrought along these lines. It was called the Stoical philosophy. It sought to achieve serenity of life by steeling the soul against the passions. And do you know what happened as a fact of history? Well, I shall tell you what actually happened—one of two results was found in life. Sometimes men won the serenity they craved, but they won it at a tremendous cost. For love was banished, and the charm of things, and the touch of sympathy that makes us brothers. And sometimes in the very hour of victory nature, trampled on, rose to her rights again, and in her passionate and overmastering way swept down the defences they had built. It is no use fighting against nature. It is worse than useless fighting against God. We are not here to stand aloof from things, and to steel our hearts against disturbances. We are here to welcome whatever God may send, whether it be sunshine or be sorrow, and somehow out of all unsettlement to wrest the music of our triumph-song.

Well now, one great help to that is learning to see things in their true proportions. Without

a certain feeling for perspective, we can never be quiet in the thick of life. You remember what Dr. Johnson said to a friend who was worrying about a trifle? '*Think, sir,*' he said, in his wise way, '*think how little that will seem a twelve-month hence.*' And if we only practised that fine art of thinking how little many a thing will seem a twelvemonth hence, we should be freed from much unsettlement to-night. It is good to know a big thing when we see it. It is not less good to know a little thing. There are people to whom the tiniest burn is as swift and dangerous as the Spey. And always when you have people of that nature, who have never taken the measurements of life, you have people who live on the margin of unsettlement. Next to the grace of God for throughbearing, there is nothing more kindly than a little humour. To see things in a smiling kind of way is often to see them in the wisest way. For as there are things, and always shall be things, that strike to the very heart of human destiny, so are there things, and always shall be things, that are so trifling as to be ridiculous. It is amazing how many worthy people seem never to have learned that simple

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lesson. You would think they had never heard the words of Jesus about swallowing the camel and straining at the gnat. And so are they always in peril of unsettlement, *not* because their experience is exceptional, but because they have never learned in life to see things in their true proportions.

But the greatest help of all is this, it is to see the hand of God in everything. When a man has come to see the hand of God in everything, he touches the secret of the weaned heart. I have noticed among domestic servants one very common reason of unsettlement. It is that they do not know who is the mistress, and have to take orders from half a dozen people. And all of us are servants in God's house, and always in our service shall be irritable, unless there be one voice we must obey, and one will which gives us all our orders. That was the meaning of the peace of Job. He saw God always, and he saw him everywhere. 'The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away,' said Job, 'blessed be the name of the Lord.' It was not God to-day and fate to-morrow. It was not heaven in the morning and blind chance at night.

Through light and shadow it was *God* to Job, and that was one secret of his rest. My brother, so is it with us all. To have many masters is always to be restless. ‘I have set the Lord always before me,’ said the Psalmist, ‘therefore I shall not be moved.’ To see *his* hand in the least and in the greatest, in the burden no less than in the blessing, is the sure way, amid all life’s unsettlement, to have the heart at leisure from itself.

INTIMACY

The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.—*Psalm xxv. 14.*

WHEN a man enjoys the friendship of the great it is always reckoned an honourable thing. To have the confidence of famous people is a distinction of which every one is proud. When people point to a man and say to you, ‘Do you see that man—he was the friend of Gladstone’; when we find ourselves in the company of one who enjoyed the intimacy of Carlyle, there is always a certain thrilling in our hearts and a deepened interest in the happy person who enjoyed the freedom of familiar intercourse with those whose names are famous in the world. I noticed the other day in the newspapers the case of a lady who had died. What the facts were I do not recall, but I was impressed by one particular. She had been the friend of Ruskin in her youth,

and had been honoured with his intimacy, and every newspaper I got my hands on put that in large letters in the heading.

Now if that be ever so with great men, how much more will it be so with God ! To be admitted to the confidence of God must be a quite incomparable honour. It is his hand that hath inspired the genius; it is his spirit that hath made the poet; it is he who hath quickened and kindled into greatness the mightiest upon the stage of history. And if it be honourable to be *their* confidant and move in the freedom of fellowship with them, how much more to be the confidant of God. That is the deep meaning of our text. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. It is not the secret of his hidden counsel; it is the secret of his hidden heart. The Psalmist tells us that there are certain people whom God delights to honour with his confidence, and to whom he reveals himself from day to day with a peculiar and delightful intimacy.

For those of us who look on Jesus Christ as the perfect revelation of the Father, that selective freedom of God, if I may call it

so, is abundantly confirmed and illustrated. There is no soul which Jesus will not save. There is no man whom Jesus does not love. There is no sheep crying in the wilderness whom the shepherd will not leave his flock to rescue. Yet universal as his mercy is, and stretching to the confines of humanity, Christ, like the Father whom he came to show, had his special and peculiar friendships. Out of the multitude who trusted him he chose twelve to be his special comrades. Out of the twelve he made a choice of three, and they were with him when he was transfigured. And then out of the three he singled one, who at the Supper lay upon his bosom, and who has been known right down the centuries as the disciple whom Jesus loved. Think you, were there not fifty cottages where Jesus would have been an honoured guest? Were there no sisters in Galilean villages to whom his coming would have been like heaven? And Jesus loved them all and blessed them all, yet was there one cottage that was doubly dear, and there was a brother and two sisters in it whom he loved in an especial way. Broad is the love of Christ as the whole world—deep is it

as our deepest need—it is high as our highest aspiration, and long as the enduring of eternity. Yet was the secret of the Lord with them that feared him. He had his intimates and special confidants. There were certain men and certain women to whom he revealed the treasures of his heart.

Let me say in passing that this peculiar intimacy is ever associated with the deepest reverence. Wherever we find it in the Christian centuries one of its marks is an adoring awe. We have a proverb, known to all of you, that familiarity begets contempt. We have another not less cynical, that no man is a hero to his valet. And the very fact that these proverbs live, and move contemptuously through our common speech, shows that they are not without foundation. Intimacy is not always blest. Sometimes it is sorely disappointing. There are men whose lives are like oil-paintings, which look their finest from a little distance. But if that be so with men sometimes, never yet hath it been so with God. The closer the intimacy of a man with God, the deeper his adoration and his awe. Abraham was the friend of God, yet he was but

dust and ashes in his sight. Moses was drawn into his secret counsel, yet who more grandly reverent than Moses? John had looked into his Master's eyes, and lain at the Supper on his Master's bosom, 'yet when I saw him,' said that same disciple, 'I fell at his feet as dead.' I well remember when I was first in Switzerland, how we looked at the great Alps from afar off. And from that distance they were so sublime that one almost shrank from any nearer view. And yet when I spent a week embosomed by them, with the glaciers reaching almost to the door, that vast sublimity was only deepened. They were not less wonderful when near at hand. They were a thousand times more wonderful and awful. There were voices whispering in these icy palaces which one had never heard from far away. And so when a man who sometime was far off is brought nigh to God by the blood of Jesus Christ, he does not cease to reverence or adore. Always distrust the religion of a man who speaks to God as to a next-door neighbour. Always distrust that light familiarity with the Almighty Maker of the universe. To know him best is to adore him most. To have his secret

is to worship him. He who is closest to the throne is on his knees.

Nor can we justly quarrel with God because he exercises that selective freedom. It is the very thing which you and I are doing in the fulfilment of that life which is his gift. What is that life which you and I possess? What is it mystically, I mean, not chemically? The deepest truth of things is never chemical. The deepest truth of everything is mystical. And what is life, then, but the overflowing of the exhaustless fountain in the heavens? In him was life, and the life was the light of men. Now did you ever think how poor *our* life would be had we no freedom in our loves and friendships? Is it not just the genius of selection that makes one life richer than another? When every one is kept at equal distance life is a miserable and empty business. It lacks much of its music and its charm. Have we not all of us our chosen friends? Have we not some who are our confidants? Do we not sometimes make the great discovery, and in a moment recognise our own? We are like Jesus in that village street, caught in the rough pushing of the crowd, yet was there one touch unlike all others—

'some one hath touched me.' Why is it that we are drawn to some people so unerringly and so effectually? And why to others, howsoever admirable, do we never unbar the gateway of the heart? To me the meaning of it all is this, that life is interpenetrated with election, whether it be the life of man on earth, or the life of the Almighty in the heavens. Good unto *all* men is the Lord. He is the Lord God merciful and gracious. I believe in his great love to all the world which moved him to send to us his Son. Yet are there those whom he delights to know in all the freedom of a blessed intimacy. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.

Now those confidants of God, if I may call them so, are never arbitrarily chosen. They are his friends because he wills it so, but they also become his friends by what they are. It is not always thus *we* make our friends. Our friendships are not always based on character. Often they take the line of least resistance, and sometimes they quicken through a common jealousy. But every friendship which is made with God runs itself down into the deeps of character—

the secret is with them *that fear him*. The note of the nightingale is never heard outside the borders of a certain area.¹ You never hear it north of York. You never hear it west of the river Exe. You may take the eggs and have them hatched in Scotland and carry the fledglings to our Scottish woods, but never will the birds come north again to give us that wonderful music of the night. Outside a certain limit they are silent, and outside a certain limit God is silent. There are frontiers for the voice of heaven, as there are for the voice of every singing bird. Only the frontiers are not geographical : they are moral, and have to do with character. They are determined by what a man desires and by the deepest craving of his soul. The poorest peasant may know more of God than he who is a master of the sciences. The mystic cobbler may have such gleams of glory as put to shame the wisdom of the wise. For except we become as little children we cannot even see the kingdom. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall *see him*.

¹ I owe this illustration to Mr. Selby, in his fine volume *The Divine Craftsman*.

Put in another way that just means this, that we must wait on God if we would learn his secret. As the eyes of a servant wait upon her mistress, so, says the Psalmist, must we wait on God. It is not by a hasty glance at an Old Master that you discern the wonder of his painting. When you confront a celebrated picture the first feeling is often disappointment. It is only as you wait and watch and ponder, and quietly linger with revering gaze, that you detect its fulness and its depth, and waken to the wonder of it all. The dalesmen used to make merry with the poet Wordsworth when they saw him sitting hour by hour on some grey stone. Some of them thought he was an idle rascal, and more of them thought he was a little crazy. But Wordsworth was watching nature like a lover, and he was passive that he might catch her voice, and he waited on nature with such a splendid faithfulness that we are all his debtors to this hour. A fickle man can never be a scholar, nor can he ever hope to be a saint. No secret that is rich is ever won without the reverence of assiduity. You must wait on Shakespeare and you must wait on science through a thousand struggling

and laborious days, if you are ever to read the mystic scroll they carry, or wrest from it the message it conveys. No self-respecting man reveals his deepest to the chance visitor or to the casual comer. He keeps his best for those who love his company and who rejoice to be with him day by day. And so the secret of the Lord is kept—and kept for ever—from the casual comer. The secret is with them that fear him.

In closing I want you to remember that this secret is given for large issues. It is not bestowed for persona enjoyment so much as for the service of mankind. There are certain plants, like that exquisite child of the spring the wood-sorrel, to which God has given two different kinds of flowers. The one is the white flower which we all love, but the other is hidden away beneath the leaves. It has no beauty that we should desire it, nor any petals which unfold in April, yet in that secret flower which you have never noticed there lies the beauty of another spring. So is it with the secret of the Lord, for it is not showy like a fair corolla, yet does it give to every life that knows it a certain gracious and beautiful fertility. The secret of the sun is

in the *coal*, and it is that secret which **makes** the coal a blessing. It warms our dwellings and drives our engine wheels because the secret of the sun is there. And if for coal, so ugly and defiling, the secret of the sunshine can do *that*, who can tell what blessing may not radiate from him who has the secret of the Lord? It will not reveal to him to-morrow's story. It will not make him nastily infallible. He will be humble as a little child set in a world that is afame with glory. But knowing God with such peculiar intimacy, for him to-morrow will be robbed of terror, and in the weariest as in the roughest day there will be direction and repose.

SELF-IGNORANCE

Who can understand his errors?—Psalm xix. 12.

It is in accordance with the best traditions of the Scottish pulpit, as well as with the true desire of every earnest heart, that on the evening preceding the Communion our thoughts should be turned inward on ourselves. ‘Everything is beautiful in its time,’ says Scripture, and that is true of all the Christian doctrines. There is a fulness of the time for every one of them, just as there is for the meanest flower that blows. And always in our Scottish pulpit, and indeed throughout the breadth of Christendom, the season that precedes the sacrament is the great time of self-examination. Every astronomer worthy of the name is constantly careful to keep his lenses clean. But when he is on the verge of some great hour, then he cleanses them with double care. And so the Christian always must be watchful—always must

be examining himself—but never more intensely so than at the season when he is looking for fresh discoveries of Christ. To-night, then, I want you to follow me while I deal for a little with self-ignorance. I want you to follow me while I try to find why most of us are so ignorant of self. For of this you may be always sure, that the more we know what we really are, the better shall we know our need of Christ and of the glorious gospel of his grace.

First, then, and on the surface, there is the full and busy life in which we share. The hand of that life opens many doors, but not the door which leads into the heart. Moments are precious now and days are full. Interests are manifold and ever changing. There is not a garret whose window does not open on the panorama of the mighty world. And just as the Indian, putting his ear to the ground, can hear far off the galloping of horses, so all the movement and music of humanity is morning by morning borne upon our ear. It was a saying of John Wesley that he had all the world for his parish. There is not a ploughman in the remotest hamlet but could say something of the same kind to-day. He

sympathises with a mourning nation,¹ and follows the armies as they march to war, and sees the Dalai Lama of the East fly from his golden city in Thibet.

Now none but a pessimist would ever doubt that in this full life are elements of value. It has developed man, and has enlarged his vision, and has helped to make him a little less parochial. It has turned the gospel into a world-wide message in a way that was never possible before. It has emphasised our social Christianity. All this is good and for it we are thankful. There is something in it which exalts the Saviour. We are learning the kingship of Jesus Christ to-day in a manner that was undreamed of once. And yet with it all there is a certain loss—a loss of quietness and of introspection. We have an added knowledge of the world, and perhaps a lessened knowledge of ourselves. We know far more than our forefathers knew about Japan and India and Thibet. The question is, do we know any more about the mystical kingdom that is *here*? And after all no kingdom in the world can flash along the wires such mighty news as can the

¹ Japan.

kingdom of a man's own soul where heaven and hell are fighting for the throne. What could Thomas Boston in lone Ettrick know of all the pageantry of nations? There was no telegraph along his valley. It was but rarely that he saw a paper. And yet I question if in this church to-night, or for that matter in the whole of Scotland, there is a single Christian who has read his heart with the patience and the genius of Boston. We have gained, and we have also lost. We have seen more widely, and are a little blinder. We know far more than our forefathers knew, and yet it may be we know a little less. It is far harder now than it was once to reap the harvest of the quiet eye, by practising, amid the stir of things, the quiet and kindly grace of recollection.

Another and a deeper cause of our self-ignorance is the gradual and silent growth of sin. You are never startled by any noise of hammering when the chains of a bad habit are a-forging. All of us are roused into attention when anything flashes suddenly upon us. It is one of the ministries of God's surprise that it arrests us when we are dull and heavy. But when a thing is gradual in its coming, and steals upon us

without sound of trumpet, it is always easy to be unobservant. If in a moment the sun shone out in splendour and midnight vanished and the sky were blue, how every eye would mark that miracle, and see in it the hand of the Divine! But like a true artist of Almighty God, the sun has a scorn for anything sensational, and never an infant is wakened from its cradle as, rising, the sun parts the curtains of the east. Think of the way in which the children grow. How silently they creep towards their heritage! It seems but yesterday since they were little infants and busied with the first stammerings of speech. And to-day they are fighting their battle with the world, and the mystery of life and sex hath touched them, and they are launched into the boundless deep—and still are children in their mother's eyes. We are all rocked to sleep by what is gradual. We let ourselves be tricked by what is silent. We miss the message of God times without number because he whispers in the still small voice. And just as we are often dulled towards God, so are we dulled to our besetting sin, it has grown so gradually, and strengthened with our strength, and never startled us

with any uproar. It is easy to see the sins of *other* people, because in a moment they are displayed to us. We see them not in the slowness of their growth, but in the sudden flash of their fulfilment. We see them as we see some neighbour's child, whom for a year or two we have not set our eyes on, and then we say, 'Bless me, how the child has grown, I never should have recognised him!' That is how we can detect our neighbour's sin. That is how we fail to see our own. It has grown with us, and lived in the same home, and sat at the same table all the time—until to-day we are living such a life as God knows we never meant to live, and tampering with conscience and with purity as God knows we never dreamed to do. Had the thing leapt on us like a wild animal we should have roused our manhood to resist it. But the most deadly evils do not *leap* on us. The most deadly evils *creep* on us. And it is that slow and silent growth of all that at last is mighty to confound, which lulls men into the strange security which always is the associate of self-ignorance.

Another reason for self-ignorance is that you never know sin's power till you oppose it. It is

as true of sin as of any other force, that you must measure its power by resistance. It is not when you are walking *with* the wind that you can measure how the wind is blowing. It is when you turn into the teeth of it that you perceive the power of the blast. And never will you learn the power of sin, nor how sweet it is, nor what a grip it has, till in the name of God you battle with it. That is what Paul means when, in the *Romans*, he says 'I had not known sin but by the law.' It was when sin was checked by the commandment that it revealed the power which was in it. It was when God said thou shalt *not*, that sin began to struggle for its life; and the commandment came, says the apostle, and sin revived and I died. Try to lift up these chainèd arms of thine, and thou wilt find how heavy are the chains. Waken that sleeping devil in thy bosom, and thou wilt find it is a sleeping Hercules. It is thus that men are led to Jesus Christ, and to feel their need of an almighty arm, and to cast themselves, as in a great despair, on him who can save even to the uttermost.

Another cause of our self-ignorance lies in the interweaving of our best and worst. In

deeper senses than the Psalmist thought of, we are fearfully and wonderfully made. I had the pleasure, some little time ago, of going over one of the cruisers of the Navy. There was a great deal that it was good to see, and with consummate courtesy we were shown it all. But the feature which seemed to interest our guide most, and to which he called particular attention, was the watertight compartments of the ship. He pointed out the fittings of the doors. He showed us how ingeniously they set. When the doors were locked there was such nice exactitude that not a penknife could have been inserted. And all this meant that in the hour of battle, if the one cabin were flooded by a shot, the other compartments would be dry.

Now it is thus that men may build, but it is not thus that the Almighty builds. There is no door of steel which closes fast between the highest and the worst in you. If all that was bad in individual character stood by itself in perfect isolation, then would we feel the joy of what was good and the dark loathsomeness of what was evil. But human character is not constructed so, with separate stations for its good and evil.

It is an intricate and inextricable tangle of what is beautiful and what is base. ‘Then I beheld,’ says Bunyan in his dream, that ‘there was a way to hell from nigh the gate of heaven.’ I think that that is so with every man: his hell and heaven are never far apart. There is something of his weakness in his strength, and the beautiful and the ugly have strange kinships, and the good and the bad in him spring up together, like the wheat and tares in Jesus’ parable. Let the philosophers sift out our faculties. Let them distinguish the reason from the will. Let them treat on *this* page of the memory and on *that* page of the imagination. Our common life makes merry with philosophers. Our common day dissolves their catalogues. And hope and faith and will, and height and depth, are interwoven in a single web. How many an action is like the water-lily—beautiful, yet rooted in the slime. How many a glimpse there is of every heaven in passions whose appointed end is misery. And it is the interweaving of such opposites in the whole range of human life and conduct which leads so often and so easily to the peril and the evil of self-ignorance.

I shall mention but one more cause of our self-ignorance, it is the low standard of our moral judgement. We manage to be contented with ourselves because of the poverty of our ideal. A sheep may look tolerably fair and clean against the greenness of the summer grass, but when the snow has fallen in virgin purity the sheep may be as a blot upon the hill. It is not the living creature that is different ; it is the *background* that is different, and I want to ask you this straight question—*What is the background of your life?* Is it the common judgement of your class ? Then you will never understand your errors. You are not worse than anybody else ; you are as good as they are any day. But how that poor and shallow self-complacency is torn and tattered into a thousand shreds when the life which once accepted social estimates is set against the background of the Christ ! Paul was proud of his moral standing once, for he could lift up his head with any Pharisee. But when Christ found him and made a man of him, the Pharisee became the chief of sinners. And it is always so when Christ comes in. We see the brightest and we see the worst. There is a heaven higher than our hope,

and there is a hell deeper than we dreamed.
Have you been wakened in any way like that?
Are you profoundly dissatisfied with self? Have
you had hours when you felt that in all the world
there could be nobody quite so bad as you?
Blessed be God for his convicting Spirit. It is
better to feel *that* than to be satisfied. It is along
that road, however dark, that the way lies to the
communion table.



